

THIRTEEN STEPS INTO
DARKNESS



MICHAEL JOB

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BY

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Dedication:

To my Daughter Emma for her whimsical
“What ifs” that inspires me to take these
flights of fancy.

And a special thank you to Darren McGuff,
whose hard work and expertise made this
book possible.

Hello dear reader, glad you could join me. It's good to know I'm not the only one who likes to delve into the dark recess of our world. Please join me on the thirteen steps into darkness, if you are offended by bad language, violence or material of a sexual explicit nature. Stop reading now!

If not.....Enjoy

In our first story, a man plagued by the demons that surround us pays the ultimate price for daring to believe.

In our second is a man who likes to kill for amusement.

Whilst in our third, a man blinded by the lustre of gold commits the ultimate sin and endures the worst that hell can offer.

The grass is always green for our fourth man, until that is; of course he reaches the other side.

Our fifth story centres on a sexually deviant to who even the dead aren't safe.

If it's puzzles you like, then the chicken and the egg is the base of our sixth.

Our seventh is a girl who dares to look into the dark, and wishes she hadn't.

It's often the ones we least expect that brings us down, as our eighth would agree.

A distraught father takes the ultimate revenge, for our ninth.

In ten we delve into our most private fears, the ones we refuse to face.

A short tale for our eleventh, when things go 'bump' in the night.

A gamble plays all or nothing for the last pot.

And finally our last tale features another sexual deviant that will stop at nothing to satisfy his burning lust.

Well there you have it! Thirteen stories of blood and gore, depravities and fears.

Welcome to the darkness!

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THE COLLECTORS

“Ugliness in beauty can reside”

Anon

WHITE!

Harry smiled, that's how he liked it. White! Nothing but white. He looked around with satisfaction at the bland featureless walls and ceiling, all painted in the same matt white. Even the floor was covered with plain white linoleum. No windows, the only illumination coming from lights set into the ceiling and even they were covered with pieces of thin white plastic, bathing the whole room with a soft ashen glow, effectively eliminating all shadows

The Spartan furniture consisted of a mattress lying in one corner, it's white cover pulled so taut not a crease could be seen anywhere.

In the centre of the room stood a simple table and two chairs, all painted white, their surfaces sanded down till they were dead flat.

Harry felt comfortable, but more than anything, he felt safe!

He jumped, as knock on the door startled him out of his reverie

GO AWAY!"

"Harry, its Dr Wilson, please open the door, I need to talk to you."

"Leave me ALONE!"

"HARRY! I'm not leaving till you open this door and talk to me, you hear?"

After a few moments of silence, he was just about to knock again when the door burst open.

"Hurry up! Come in if you must. QUICKLY!!"

Wilson entered swiftly as the door began to close on him. Then stood open mouthed in shock as the room's decor assailed his senses.

He turned to Harry and was greeted by an even bigger shock. Harry was naked!

Not only that, he had shaved every hair of his body, even his eyebrows!

Like most naked men in their early fifties he looked quite comical. The coldness of the room had enlisted an army of goose pimples, all standing to attention, over the flaccid white skin of a pot belly drooping precariously

from the top of two scrawny legs. This added to his large beak like nose, gave a good impression of a plucked chicken.

"Well! What do you want?" Harry snarled.

"Your sister asked me to call, she's very worried about you. She says ever since you discharged yourself from the clinic, you've been acting very strange!"

"Interfering busybody, what's it got to do with 'er?"

"Harry this is your *sisters* house! What do you expect her to think when she sees all this?" He gave an expansive wave of his hand as he looked around the room. "Why Harry, what's it all for?"

"Have to! Only way to stop them! No patterns, no shadows, only white. White!" He rolled his hands together nervously, as his wild eyes scanned the room. "Only way. Must stop them. MUST!"

Harry flinched as Wilson touched his arm, "Easy Harry. Easy, no one's going to hurt you. Look, sit down and tell me who it is you're so afraid of."

He sat him down at the table, and suppressing a smile at the sound of Harry's ample bare bottom slapping the chair, took the seat opposite. He placed his elbows on the table to make a pyramid of his arms, rested his chin on his hands then said,

"Now Harry just who is it you're afraid of?"

"You know? Like before. The collectors!"

"Collectors? Ah! Yes I seem to recall, there was something...."

Wilson bent down and rummaged in his crocodile skin briefcase "Ah here it is." He withdrew a file of papers and placed them on the table in front of him. "Hmmm, yes, I remember now. You said you thought there were demons after you."

"Collectors!" Harry corrected.

"Oh yes, that's right you call them collectors. Look! Instead of me reading all this, why don't you tell me again in your own words?"

Harry leaned across the table and whispered, "It's them, they're trying to get me, like they did with George Taylor."

"George Taylor....? Oh yes he's the one that ran away from the clinic?"

With a frightened smile Harry shook his head, "He didn't escape, THEY got him! I saw it! And now they want me! ME!" He gripped Wilson's hand hard, squeezing till his knuckles cracked. He leaned further forward till their noses were almost touching, "THEY WANT Meeeee!"

Wilson extricated his hand from Harry's grip, then flexing some life back

into it said. "Relax Harry, relax. Now why don't you start from the beginning, hmmm!"

Harry settled back in his chair and studied Wilson. The large Mexican moustache couldn't disguise the fact that he was much too young for Harry's liking. With clothes more in keeping with a business man than a Doctor. Both his hands sported several ornate rings, which Harry considered inappropriate for a man of his profession.

How could this mere kid, sorry! This mere *rich* kid! Fresh out of medical school with qualifications probably bought by an even richer father, help him? How could he possibly understand!

Still.... Beggars can't be choosers. He sighed and looked Wilson straight in the eyes.

"I'm not mad." He said, "If you look at that file you'll see. I was a voluntary patient at the clinic, suffering from nervous exhaustion that's all.

That's where I met George, he was in the next room to me and we used to share the same table at meal times. He's the one that told me about the collectors. Of course I didn't believe him! Not then! But now...."

"What exactly did he tell you?" Wilson prompted.

"He told me where hell was! It's not in some mythical underground cavern. It's here! All around us! Occupying the same space, but in a slightly different dimension. All the demons! The tempters! The collectors of lost souls, there HERE!!!"

"Well if they are." Wilson argued, "How come no one but you can see them?"

"But you do see them, you DO! Everybody does! Look at any pattern long enough and you'll see them! Hiding! They're everywhere! In the flames of a fire, the petals of a flower even in the folds of your clothes and the cut of your own hair.

That's where you'll find them watching, waiting for a chance to make mischief or to trap you, to turn you into one of *them*."

"Harry be reasonable." Wilson interrupted, "Of course it's possible to see faces and images in patterns. In fact it's one of the tests we do in psychology when determining a patient's illness. But that's all they are, images! They can't hurt you!"

Harry sneered, "That's what I thought until I saw for myself, till I saw what happened to George Taylor."

Wilson rocked back in his chair and sighed, "Okay Harry, tell me about it."

Harry averted his eyes to his folded hands on the table and began.

"It was a Thursday, and I was really cheesed off. George had been on at me all day to change rooms with him, said his was to fancy with too many patterns, you remember his relatives paid extra for it. Anyway he kept on at me, pleading with me, said they had found out that he knew about them and were out to get him.

All day he went on at me, all *bloody* day! Well eventually I'd had enough; I called him a raving nutter! Said I was fed up having to listen to him and his stupid stories, and to push off and stop bothering me."

"And that's when he ran away?" interrupted Wilson.

"No. Though I wish to God he had done, now! Anyway as I was saying. I couldn't sleep that night. I guess I was feeling a little guilty, being harsh with him and all. When I heard a 'bump' come from his room. I thought maybe he'd fell out of bed or something. So I went round and listened at his door. I could hear a scuffling sound, so I opened his door, just a crack and peered in. And that's when I saw it happen."

Wilson raised an eyebrow, "What?"

Harry nervously rubbed his hand over his mouth. "He was stood against the wall, you know the one with the pretty rose wallpaper, and it looked like he was kissing it! Only he wasn't.

'IT! Was eating him!'"

"Oh come on, that's not possible." Wilson protested.

Harry gripped Wilson's hand again, "It's true I tell yer! I saw it with my own eyes. He was trying to get away, really struggling, but there were... *Things!* protruding from the carpet, horrible insect like things, pinning his feet to the floor."

Harry looked away from the doctor, his eyes vacant as his mind recalled the scene from the dark recesses of his memory.

"There where green leaf like tentacles coming out of the wallpaper. They were wrapped behind his head, and were pulling him with incredible force onto the pattern of a rose. Only it wasn't a rose anymore. It looked more like the mouth of some hideous malformed crab, with hundreds of little mandibles, each one slowly pulling bits of flesh off his face."

Harry's face screwed up in revulsion, as if he'd just found a grub in something he'd half eaten. "By that time his mouth and most of his nose were gone. His one eye was pointing in my direction. I think he must have seen me, because the look in his eye..... God! I never want to see an eye look like that again....So much pain!

It seemed to be pleading for help! And I wanted to help him, I really DID!" He looked straight at Wilson and squeezed his hand in emphasis.

"I did want to help him but... Then I noticed the rest of the wallpaper... They weren't rose's anymore either. They were faces too. Horrible grotesque parodies of faces, and they were looking at him and laughing, enjoying his suffering. And it wasn't only the wallpaper; the whole room was full with every abomination that hell could create. I was scared, real scared...So I just stood there, frozen to the spot.

"Then I heard his skull crack!" Harry shivered.

"When I looked again, his eye had rolled up into his head so all you could see was the white. Then it was against the wall too, being squeezed like water filled balloon, and those things were picking at it.

Harry smiled grimly and said, "Do you know what it sounds like when someone's eyes burst, Hmmm. do you?"

"Harry this isn't getting us any...."

"It sounds like tomato sauce coming out of a bottle, that's what it sounds like. Only it doesn't look like tomato sauce. Oh no! It's just a watery yellow liquid."

Harry, tears rolling down his face, began to laugh hysterically,

Don't you find that funny Doc. Hey? Don't you find that really ironic? Ha ha ha. Our precious eyes, Our oh so *wonderful* eyes! Hee hee hee. Are nothing more than little balls of piss! Ha ha ha...."

As Wilson watched, Harry's face crumpled into despair. His laughter turned to weeping as he buried his head into his folded arms on the table.

Wilson lost for something to say merely tapped Harry's arm reassuringly.

Harry suddenly sat up straight, determined to finish what he'd started. Rubbing his nose along his naked forearm he sniffed loudly, and continued.

"Anyway (sniff) those things gradually dragged his body into the wall. They did it real slow, as if to prolong the suffering for as long as possible. His left foot was the last to go. It was quivering I remember. It was probably nothing more than a nervous reaction. At least, I hope to God that's all it was. I'd hate to think that they had the power to.... That he was still al..." Harry swallowed hard.

"But Harry!" Wilson reasoned, "If that were true, there would have been blood all over the place, and there wasn't any!"

"There was! To start with, but then it started to run UP the wall. Like a film in reverse it all collected in one spot and then got smaller and smaller till it disappeared into the pattern of the paper."

They sat staring at each other, neither speaking, till finally Wilson prompted "So what did you do then?"

"Nothing!" Harry replied, "I just stood there. Till I noticed the wallpaper! It still had faces all over it. Only now they were looking at ME, and they weren't laughing anymore they were snarling. They knew I'd seen them and they were angry. Then I felt something on my feet. It was them things that got George, them horrible stick things, and they were trying to hold me down. But I was too quick for them, and I ran." His voice began to rise, speaking faster and shriller every second.

"I ran down the corridor. It was like trying to run through treacle though. Every time my feet touched the floor them things reached out and grabbed me. But I knew what they'd do if they caught me, so I didn't let them stop me. Oh no! I kicked and stamped my way all the way down there. Till eventually they managed to trip me up! I landed flat out on my stomach and knocked the wind right out of me. I thought I was a goner then!

I could see the look of glee on their faces as they reached out for me, and then, God bless her, the nurse came around the corner. She'd heard me running and had come to investigate.

So they let me go, melting back into the patterns from where they came. They didn't want to! I could see the anger and frustration in their faces, but they had no choice! They can't afford an audience. The more people that know about them, the more dangerous and difficult it is for them to hide.

After that I made sure I was never alone, not for a second."

Wilson patted the back of Harry's hand, "Now listen to me Harry. What you experienced was just a hallucination brought on by stress, that's all! As you say, you were suffering from nervous exhaustion. Well! These things are quite common for people with that complaint. As for George, he just ran away. The police will find him eventually, you see if they don't."

Harry shook his head, "No no no, you don't understand! The following day I waited till the cleaner went into his room then followed her. I checked the piece of wallpaper where he disappeared." He leaned forward and whispered into Wilson's ear, "There's an *extra* rose on that piece of paper!"

Wilson scoffed, "You're not trying to tell me....?"

Harry nodded vigorously, "Yes! George never left. He's part of the *wallpaper!*"

"Harry." Wilson jeered, "People do NOT! disappear into wallpaper, or anything else for that matter!"

"But I saw..."

"NO! Harry, you did not see anything of the sort. It's all in your imagination."

"But George IS! Missing?"

"I told you, George just ran away. It's not that unusual, some patients *do* get so overwrought they feel they need to escape, so they run!"

Harry shook his head in denial, "No it was real! I was there. I *saw*!!"

This time Wilson reached across and took hold of Harry's hands.

"Look Harry think about it! If they were after you like you say, why didn't they get you when you were doing all this?" He indicated the room with raised eyebrows.

Harry smirked, "'Cause I was smart that's why. I made my sister stay with me the whole time."

"The *whole* time?!"

"Yes, even when I had to use the lavatory, I made her come too! Same as I went with her, when she had to go!"

Oh lord the poor woman. Wilson exhaled loudly, "And all this white is supposed to prevent these... demons, collectors or what ever, from forming. That right?!"

"Yes there's no patterns see? No way to get to me. They can't hide in a blank colour, anymore than a black grizzly bear could hide in a snow field!"

"But I'M wearing patterns, are there any demons on me?" Wilson asked smiling, holding his arms out for inspection.

Harry nodded.

"What?! Wilson's smile vanished instantly. "Where?" He suddenly felt very itchy all over.

Harry's eyes roamed over Wilson's body with obvious disgust, "There all over you. I can see them; I can see the hate in their faces, the hunger in their eyes. Oh my God! There even in your hair!!"

Wilson resisting the urge to run his fingers through his prematurely thinning hair, countered, "Then why don't they come out and get us both?"

"Because *you* don't believe! That's why! No matter however much I tell you, as long as you don't believe me your safe. Not believing in them weakens their hold on this world.

It's like the medicine men of ancient tribes, if you believed in their power, they could literally wish you to death. But to those who don't believe, they were just harmless old men whistling in the wind.

That's what's keeping us safe now, your disbelief! Like I was safe at the clinic, till I got nosy and saw something I shouldn't."

"And George Taylor told you all this?" queried Wilson

"Yes, George had made a study of the occult. He was very much into

Demons. Gremlins and strange disappearances and all that kind of thing.

You see George had a theory that they were all the same thing! When people say there are gremlins in something. That's not just a figure of speech; they are really IN there, in the form of patterns and shapes.

It's the same when you see ordinary objects in a half-light; they always look strange and somehow...Threatening. That's because they ARE! The darkness is their element. The lack of the sun's energy somehow weakens the barrier between us. This makes them more visible, and worse, easier for them to cross over.

Why do you think man has always feared the dark through out the ages? It's no illusion they really exist!"

"So how do the strange disappearances come into it?" said Wilson?

"Well like I said earlier, they don't like an audience. BUT! Sometimes if a group of people are cut off from the outside world, and one of them can be made to believe in their existence. They will take them all.

Perhaps that's why so many ships were lost in the olden days, with no radio and no way to communicate with the outside world, they'd be obvious targets. Take the Mary Celeste, found drifting with no crew aboard. Yet in perfect working order, with no lifeboats missing and stranger still, in the crews quarters they found half-finished meals, as if the crew had left quickly, taking nothing with them. No one knows why?

But maybe the crew never left, perhaps there still there as part of the woodwork or the bedding or any other thing that's got a pattern. See?"

Wilson sighed with defeat. They sat staring at each other in silence for a few seconds. Then leaning forward slightly, Wilson softly suggested, "Harry, I'd like you to come back to the clinic with me."

"NO!" Harry shot to his feet, the legs of the chair squeaking noisily on the floor as it skidded away. Wilson recoiled back in his chair, at the sudden appearance of Harry's bald penis swinging pendulously just a few inches from his nose.

Harry backed away from his companion, his face stiff with fright, his wild eyes bulging almost too bursting point.

"YOU 'AINT TAKIN' ME BACK THERE!" He screamed as he backed into a corner. Then sliding to the floor he hugged his knees to his chest and began making pathetic high-pitched mewling sounds.

Wilson went over and knelt before him, "It's for your own good, Harry, we can look after you better there."

Harry squeezed himself tighter into the corner, "Want to stay here. Safe here. No patterns. Pleaseeeeeeeeeee I want to stay here. Don't make me go.

Pleaseeeeeeeeeee. They'll get me like they got George!"

"No one's going to get you. I promise!"

Clearly Harry didn't believe him.

"Look" said Wilson, deciding to humour him. "You say these things can't get you if you're with someone that doesn't believe. Right? Someone with contact with the outside world. Yes?"

Harry nodded suspiciously.

"Well how about if I put you into our high security wing. I may not be able to assign an assistant to stay with you all the time. BUT!.. I can arrange for you to have one of the rooms with a surveillance camera fitted. Then you would be under constant observation twenty four hours a day. Your little friends wouldn't dare show the faces then would they?"

"Well... No...But why bother? I'm safe enough here."

"Oh yes! And what about your sister, say she has a heart attack or something. Then what do you do about food? Stay in here and starve, or go out and get it yourself. Out *there!* On your *own!* Amongst all those *patterns!*"

Harry looked crestfallen. Obviously it was something he hadn't considered.

"Well, shall I ring the clinic and tell them to expect us?"

Harry thought for a second, and then gave a quick nod in agreement.

"Excellent!" Wilson slapped his thighs as he rose, pleased with himself for tricking him into agreeing to the high security wing.

"I'll just go and ring them to let them know were coming."

"WAIT!" Harry scuttled after Wilson as he approached the door. "Let me see you out so I can lock the door behind you."

"That really isn't necessary; I'll only be a couple of minutes."

"Please Doc'. I'd feel happier with it locked" Then seeing the suspicion in his eyes added. "I'll let you in again. I promise!"

"Okay Harry, if you insist." As he stepped through the door he turned and watched as it closed behind him. Heard the lock turn with an audible click. Then stood there shaking his head in dismay.

Christ! He's in a bad way.

He walked down the hall to the living room, where Harry's Sister, Nellie, waited for news. As he entered the room, she quickly rose from her seat, and faced him, obvious concern written across her face.

She was a portly woman, middle forties, with her fair share of her

brother's features.

For a split second Wilson wondered what she would look like, naked and completely bald like her brother. Then hastily shrugged the unsightly image away.

"I'd like to use the phone if I may?"

"Oh yes Doctor of course. Please help yourself it's in the hall. Is....is he alright? I mean will he... ?!"

"I've spoken with him and he's agreed to come back to the clinic."

She sighed with relief, shrinking several inches like a deflating balloon. Making Wilson realize just how strung up she must have been.

"Yes, I think that's for the best, er... How long will he... I mean he *will* get better. Won't he?"

"We all hope so. But as for exactly how long....." He shrugged "Only time will tell. Now if you'll excuse me I must call the clinic."

He walked into the hall and picked up the receiver. Offered Nellie a weak smile as she hovered around the doorway watching him, and dialed.

"Hello. This is Doctor Wilson; put me through to ward five please. Thank you..." As he waited to be connected a piercing scream filled the house. Desperately shrill it bored through Wilson's body as if speared by an icicle. The screaming was coming from the end of the hall.

Harry's room!

Wilson dropped the phone and raced up the hall, pushing past Harry's sister who stood frozen, hands to her face, staring horrified in the direction of the screaming.

Wilson tried the door, locked. He banged on the door with his fist and yelled.

"*HARRY. OPEN THE DOOR. HAR....*" he was cut off by a scream that was much worse than all the others put together. A scream that sounded more animal than human. So terrifying, Wilson jumped back from the door as if electrified, and was suddenly grateful for its presence between him and the unholy sound from within. Then with sudden resolve charged the door with his shoulder.

It was like hitting a brick wall!

He rubbed his shoulder as he turned to the Nellie, "Is there another key to this room?"

She looked at him as if he were talking a foreign language,

"W..what?"

"A key! Is there another key?"

"Er... Yes I think there's one in..."

"GET IT!!! QUICK".

The screaming stopped! The house was suddenly deathly still.

"Harry open the door!"

Nothing!

Wilson put his ear to the door. He could hear movement and a curious snapping and cracking noise. He frowned, sounds like he's breaking the furniture up.... Why would he...?

"Harry Are you alright? *HARRY!*"

"Here I've found it!" said Nellie as she wobbled up the hall.

Wilson took the key; thrust it into the lock, and turning it threw the door open and rushed in.

Wilson looked around the room in amazement. Every thing was intact. No broken table, no broken chairs. The bed still lay in the corner its cover as taut as ever. Everything was as he'd left it? Except!

Harry was gone!

"Now Sir, let me see if I've got this right" said the constable, as he read from his notebook. "You say you heard him screaming when you were standing outside his door, which was locked from the inside."

"Yes officer."

"But that when you got inside the room, he wasn't there."

"That's correct."

"And ...er... This room has no other way out, any doors or windows, and he didn't pass you as you entered."

Wilson shifted uncomfortably from foot to foot, "Look I know how it sounds, but that's what happened. Ask his sister she was there as well!"

"My colleague's just taking a statement from the lady now, Sir. But in the meantime have you any idea where the gentleman may have gone. Seeing as how you say you didn't see him leave!"

"I don't know!" Snapped Wilson as he became more and more exasperated. "Perhaps there's a hidden door somewhere.... An escape hatch

or something? "How should I know? You're the policemen you tell me!"

"We are doing our best Sir, but this case is a little unusual, to say the least! Perhaps the forensic boys will come up with something?"

The second officer stepped from the living room to join them in the hall.

"Did you manage to get a statement off the lady, Frank?"

Frank shook his head "No she's out of it! Doc's given her a sedative to calm her down. I'll try again later."

"Look! It's not for me to tell you how to do your job officer. *But!* Has someone informed your patrols to be on the look out for him? This man is seriously deranged and must be found urgently!"

The constable stared at him soberly, then turned to his partner,

"Have there been any reports of a naked, hairless man running around the streets, Frank?"

Frank biting the inside of his mouth to stop himself smiling replied, "No! Not recently"

"There you are Sir, but don't worry *IF* he's out there, we'll find him, and see that he's looked after."

Wilson bridled at the 'if' but biting his tongue said "Well Constable, *WHEN* you find him, I would appreciate a call. You can reach me at the clinic."

"Ah yes." said the policeman as he consulted his notebook again, "That's the HIGHTOWERS CLINIC for the MENTALLY ILL. And that's where you....*work!* Doctor?"

Wilson glared at the constable, the back of his neck red with repressed rage, "*Call me!*" He snarled through clenched teeth.

Then stormed out of the house and jumped into his car.

He was just about to pull off, when someone knocked on the side window. He looked over to see the rugged face of the policeman named Frank peering at him through the glass.

"Yes what is it?!" said Wilson, lowering the window.

"I'd like to apologize Sir, You see my partner can get a bit touchy when he thinks people are trying to tell him how to do his job. I know that's no excuse, but I'd just like you to know he's a good copper."

Wilson sighed loudly, "That's alright constable, I guess I asked for it. Think no more about it. Okay?!"

Frank smiled "Thank you Sir. Oh by the way you left this behind." He held up Wilson's briefcase.

"Thank you constable" he said taking it from him. "I don't know how I came to leave that behind."

"Easy done Sir. You'd left it under the table in that funny white room!"

In the white room!

Wilson looked at the case open-mouthed.

"Wouldn't do to leave it behind, Sir. Looks expensive that does. I like things made out of crocodile skin. It's such a nice *pattern!!*"

Wilson flipped on his headlights as he drove along the darkening highway, his mind racing. Where had Harry disappeared? How could he have got out without being seen? His eyes strayed to the briefcase. *No!* That was absurd! But all the same... Where *HAD* he gone!

He turned up the ramp that led to the motorway slip road, accelerated to match the rest of the traffic and sliding into the near side lane rapidly moved across to the fast lane. There he settled back in his seat and reviewed the conversation he'd had with Harry.

It was all nonsense of course! But... he hated to admit it; Harry had seemed to make it all sound so... Logical! Again the corner of his eye strayed to the case. Harry had been terrified of patterns, and the case certainly had a very strong pattern, *and* it was inadvertently left in the room with Harry when he was on his own....

NO!! That was ridiculous; Wilson smiled, admonishing himself for even contemplating such a thing.

Then in an act of bravado, to show to himself that he was beyond such absurdities. Pulled the case closer and turned it till its broad surface was bathed in the green light from the dashboard.

'Now what had Harry said, look at any pattern long enough and you'll find them. Well let's see what we can find!' Wilson mused.

With one eye on the road, he studied the texture of the crocodile skin. Wilson smiled. *'Hmmm that bit looks a bit like a poodle.'* *'Behold the dreaded man eating poodle from the planet Zon!'* He chuckled to himself.

'And over there, could be a fish swimming around a tulip.' Wilson laughed aloud, "A psycho-analyst would have a field day with that?" he muttered

"And over here could be a...?"

His mouth suddenly went very dry. *NO! It's just my imagination it couldn't be...* He looked closer. There was no mistake.

One section of the skin resembled, very closely, the figure of a naked man, a *HAIRLESS* naked man, caught in the act of screaming!

Coincidence! Wilson thought as he shifted his gaze back to the road. It's just because he's on my mind that's all, nothing else. It's just a pattern; if I clear my mind and look again it won't be there.

Only he didn't want to look again. But some perverse curiosity inside him just had to *KNOW!*

So he looked.

His heart jumped into his mouth, it was still there, but it had changed position!

It was now looking at *HIM!*

It's just my imagination, it is, it is, it *IS!!*

But as he looked at it, the image.. *Moved*. Its tortured expression melted into a malicious leering smile.

Wilson felt very cold, though the heater was going full blast, he shivered as though frozen.

"*OH my GOD it's TRUE!!*" He said aloud, and then quickly tried to deny it as Harry's words came back to him.

"....*You're safe as long as you don't believe...*"

Too late!

Every surface in the car, which wasn't flat and featureless, began to writhe to and fro, forming shapes, defying imagination.

Wilson shrieked from a sudden sharp pain in his fingers. He stared in disbelief as the filigree pattern in his rings, grew into long strands of golden barbed wire, which curled themselves round his hands and fingers, binding them steadfastly to the steering wheel. Before continuing outwards and anchoring themselves to the dashboard.

As he tried to free his hands the wire slowly began to tighten, cutting into his yielding flesh, and grating against the bone.

At the same time thin filaments extruded from the seat cover, like the legs of a centipede they wriggled over his body seeking purchase. Finally, like Gulliver, he was pinned to the seat, unable to move a muscle.

As he raced down the motorway, he tried to tell himself it was all a dream, a horrible nightmare. That the pain in his hands was unreal, that none of this was really happening.

Then he felt the hairs of his moustache squirming. Like the snakes on the head of the Gorgon, they writhed and swayed. He looked down his nose and

saw them twisting and stretching into one long tentacle. He drew his head back in horror as it turned and began to slide up his nostril.

He began panting terror stricken, as it slid further and further up into his nose, through the nasal cavity and into the skull. Pain filled Wilson's head like a white hot knife as the curling, twisting tentacle wriggled between the base of the skull and the brain itself. Probing, searching, finally turning back and following the optic nerve to the back of the left eye.

And there it *PUSHED!*

Wilson screamed, bright orange flashes exploded in his vision as the twisted hair pricked the optic nerve. He tried to close his left eye, in a vain attempt to hold the eye in place as the eye was relentlessly pushed forward.

"NO! NO! *Noooooooooo*" screamed Wilson as the eye forced its way past the straining eyelid and plopped onto his cheek.

Still the car thundered down the motorway, the demons forcing him to keep it on course.

With his one good eye fixed on the road ahead. His left eye swung too and fro with the motion of the car, disorientating him as it brought a view of his body at angles no one was ever meant to see.

The pain in his hands was intolerable, he heard more than felt the bone crack in one of his fingers; with his right eye he saw the wire finish cutting through the last bit of its remaining meat. Then the disembodied finger rolled down his arm and dropped into his lap, and lay there twitching directly under the gaze of the swinging left eye.

His terror reached new heights as his dangling eye saw the fabric of the seat cover between his legs tear, and a wavy flat steel spring, wriggle through the opening like an emerging worm.

It was the last thing the eye saw, as at that moment the twisted hair tentacle, wrapped itself around the all seeing orb, and *squeezed*.

As the cornea distorted under the stress, so the contents of the car took on the appearance of a Hall of mirrors. Everything became bent and disproportional, rapidly getting more acute. Until the eye eventually exploded wetly, showering his face with warm liquid.

"...Little bags of piss.."

But worse than that! He felt the spring slide its way under him. Heard the material of his trousers tearing, and then felt the first cold kiss of steel as it slid inside.

Wilson thrashed about as much as was possible, screaming incessantly. He clamped his buttocks hard, but still the spring forced its way upward, ripping as it went.

Wilson began to weep in total despair, hoping, wanting, *NEEDING* death to take him, to spare him the torture that must surely follow.

Through his one remaining tear filled eye, he could see the swirling faces that inhabited the walnut veneer dashboard.

Their laughing malignant features told him only too well, that he would be spared nothing, that Harry had been right, they had the power to keep him alive while they took him, right to the end.

He tried to close his one remaining eye, to blot out their evil faces. Instantly the hair tentacle was there, forcing the lids apart. Not trying to blind him, oh no! Just the opposite, they wanted him to see what was happening to him, wanted to make his suffering complete.

Now he could feel the spring deep within him, twisting, hooking, and then PULLING. His body jerked down violently resisting the springs egress. Slowly succumbing, and in unbearable agony, something soft and squishy was pulled from his rectum. Then it was on its way up again; for more!

In those few seconds Wilson became insane.

Driven by desperation and with the strength born only to those who are truly mad. Wilson snatched his hands from the wheel, leaving most of his left-hand, and all the fingers of his right still tied to the wheel.

With his bloody stumps he pushed down hard on the cross piece of the wheel. The car slued into the crash barrier amid a shower of sparks and crunching metal.

The barbed wire lashed at his arms as it fought to gain control of what was left of his hands, but Wilson would not be denied. He kept pushing on the wheel, driving it hard into the crash barrier.

The metal against metal filled the car with a teeth-shattering screech, as the car pressed against it. Vivid yellow sparks flew past the window like a giant child's sparkler on Guy Fakes night, illuminating the inside with a fiery glow.

Suddenly they reached an emergency turning point. As the car came to the angled barrier it ran up it like a rocket on a takeoff ramp.

Silence!

As the car flew through the air for what seemed an eternity, all was quiet all was calm. In his insanity Wilson smiled, he'd always wanted to learn to fly. Now here he was flying his car to some magical far away never-never land.

Then it crashed onto the opposite side of the motorway in an explosion of metal and glass, bounced, rolled over four or five times, to finish up in a long skid on its drivers side. The tarmac a huge rasp flaying the flesh from his

shoulder as it slid, before finally coming to a halt facing the oncoming traffic.

Wilson in mortal agony looked through the shattered windscreen and prayed for God. *Any God*, to take him.

And when he did come for him, he didn't come in flowing white robes with a fanfare of trumpets.

But in the shape of a sixteen wheel articulated lorry, to the sound of a compressed air bull horn,

Wilson saw the look of horror on the driver's face as he wrenched his wheel to the side. He heard the squeal of rubber fighting for grip as the lorry jack-knifed. Its rear end swung around, becoming bigger and bigger as its rear tyre loomed through the remains of the windscreen, till the whole world consisted of nothing but that jagged hole and the enormous wheel that bore relentlessly through it.

Wilson welcomed it with a smile.

DAILY CHRONICLE.

.... Police today revealed the details of last night's accident on the M3 motorway.

It's believed that the car belonging to Dr JR Wilson, of Hightower's hospital, crossed the central reservation and collided with a lorry, being driven by Mr. Sean O, Flaterty, of Doncaster.

Police believe that a mechanical fault or a blown tyre may have caused Dr Wilson's car to cross the carriageway.

Mr. O, Flaterty was later released from hospital suffering only mild cuts and bruises.

Dr Wilson however has not yet been found. Police believe he was thrown out of the car by the impact; a search is still going on to find the body....

THE END.

Ssss...snake

“All creatures great and small”

Hymn

Brian stopped and breathed in the clean fresh air of the woods around him. He liked walking through Cannock Chase, especially when he was off the beaten track. Not for him the wide shale pathways. He liked to take off down the little tracks that took you deep into the Chase, amid the tall trees and thick bracken.

Taking the water bottle from his jeans pocket, Brian put it to his lips and took a good couple of swallows. “Whoo!” He said to himself, wiping his lips with the back of his hand “This walking sure makes you thirsty,” He looked along the path he’d chosen to follow. It was one of his favourites. The path was little more than a narrow stretch of trodden down grass that meandered between high overhanging ferns and thick brambles. A path he’d made himself over the past summer months. Putting the bottle back in his pocket Brian sighed disappointedly. He’d already walked a long way and still hadn’t found anything to entertain him. With a disgruntled snort he carried on down the path, occasionally limbo dancing under an overhanging brier, which had the effrontery to get in his way.

The pathway eventually came into a small clearing no more than fifteen feet by ten. On one side a fallen tree lay at the feet of its brothers amid a carpet of tall grass and stinging nettles. The other side a mass of thick bramble rose to head height, whilst the other end of the clearing tapered down to the same type of twisting narrow path he’d just followed.

Brian moved to the centre and looked about him, he liked it here, it was really very pretty. The way the sun dappled the lush vegetation with pools of light made it look magical. That mixed with the serene silence made it seem like a fairy grotto.

Not that’s what he’d come for of course. Brian’s tastes were somewhat more...Dark!

Something on the fallen tree caught his eye; something small and black. Brian smiled.

Entertainment!

Protected by his jeans Brian waded slowly through the undergrowth up to the tree. It was a beetle, maybe twenty millimetres long, Its shiny back reflected the golden sunlight like oil on water. Brian leaned in till his face was only a few inches away. "Hello beetle." He said grinning from ear to ear. When it didn't move at the sound of his voice, he gently blew on it. He saw with delight how it settled down on its haunches as it suddenly became aware of his presence. "Well go on then! Run!" He reached out and prodded its backside. Instantly the beetle was off, running along the tree trunk as fast as it could. Brian followed it laughing aloud as he chased it with two fingers running along after it like a small pair of legs. He watched as its little legs pumping back and forth in desperation almost made it to the end of the tree trunk and safety. Before Brian, laughing even louder began to chant.

"Run, Run as fast as you can!"

"You can't escape me I'm the exterminator man!"

And with that, brought his clenched fist down hard, squashing the beetle in one swift blow. *Splat!*

Oh yes. Brian liked to kill things! Since he was a lad he'd enjoyed the feeling of power he got from killing things.

He remembered how when he was a child how his mother had reprimanded him. How she'd tried to scare him by telling him the King of the spiders, or caterpillars or anything he'd just killed, would come and get him some day in revenge. It was always the King of something!

He laughed as recalled how she'd once threatened him with the King of the butterflies and remembered how he'd laughed in her face with the words

"Oooo! I'm really scared! What's he gonna do, Mom? Beat me to death with its wings? Ha ha ha"

She'd looked down at him with such a look of disappointment that the laughter had died in his throat and he'd been forced to look away.

"You'll grow out of it" she'd said as she turned away," When you're older and wiser. You'll grow out of it!"

But he hadn't! Whilst most boys grow out of that cruel stage, Brian had carried it through to adulthood. Even at the age of thirty-two, he still took great satisfaction from killing any small creature solely for his amusement.

With a satisfied smile he wiped the dead carcass from his hand against the tree trunk, Brian's shoulders slumped the smile disappearing from his face.

This evening's walk had been a bit of a disappointment. One beetle! One lousy fucking beetle!

Not like a few days ago when he'd managed to catch that squirrel. The smile returned as he remembered how he'd swung it around and around his head by its tail, before smashing its head against the side of a tree. Or better than that, how he'd come across that Adder warming itself on a large rock. How he'd beaten it to death with a bit of broken branch as it tried to escape. That had been good! That was real he-man stuff! He felt like Tarzan!

He looked between the trees to the rapidly setting sun, its orange light frosting the foliage with a golden hue. It was time to set back.

As he turned he spotted a bird fly out of the sky and land in a nest high in the trees.

Hmmm! Not much but something

He scoured the path for something to throw. He could find only two stones of any size amid the mainly grassy clearing

With his tongue peeking out from the corner of his mouth and one eye half closed, he drew back his hand, aimed, and threw the stone with all his might. The stone sailed by the nest before crashing into the undergrowth.

Missed! Sod it!!

He took aim again with the second stone. This time it hit the tree trunk just below the nest..

SHIT!!

With no more stones to throw, Brian gave an exasperated sigh. This walk had been a complete waste of time.

Still, thought Brian, I might be able to find something on the way back. Perhaps I'll find another nest, one lower down among the brier. Just like the one he'd found in the spring. That had been filled with new-born chicks, featherless and blind. He relished again the feel of their warm bodies in his hands. Their pathetic squawking turning to high pitch squeals as their frail bones crunched in his grip, squeezing what little life they had from their tiny bodies.

Yes! Maybe he'd get lucky.

Brian turned to go back down the narrow path home and stopped with a start! Lying coiled up in the centre of the path was a snake! After getting over the initial shock, Brian began to smile.

Maybe this evening isn't a waste of time after all!

He looked closer and was surprised to see that the snake was neither a grass snake nor an Adder. It was basically yellow in colour with a mottled brown

pattern down its back. It was also large than normal. He been walking through the chase on and off for years but had never come across one like this before.

Maybe it was someone's pet snake that had escaped, or some kind of albino Adder, although without the tell tale 'V' on its head he doubted it.

"I don't give a fuck what you are!" he said smirking at the snake, "As soon as I find a nice big stic....."

The words stuck in his throat as another snake slid out of the bracken and coiled up beside the other. It was the same colour!

Brian backed off a little.

Two pet snakes!?

The idea made no sense. The odds of two strange snakes appearing together like this were astronomical. Now faced not by just one, but two snakes! Brian wasn't feeling quite so brave. Deciding it was best not to antagonize them by attacking them with a stick. Brian opted to try a scare them away. Taking a few steps back, he lunged forward, stamping his feet hard on the ground whilst yelling down at them.

"Arghhhhhhh!!" *Stomp, stomp, stomp.*

Instead of slinking away, both snakes reared up, hissing loudly with mouths open wide showing wickedly long fangs glistening with venom. They swayed ominously towards him.

Brian stopped dead in his tracks. This wasn't right! Snakes were cowardly by nature and always fled when faced with a larger opponent. But these two, not only hadn't fled, but were actually coming towards him!

Sod this for a ball of chalk! Thought Brian, *I'll go the other way home.*

He turned on his heels and strode over to the other path leading from the clearing, and was alarmed to find another snake, this one a normal Adder, waiting for him there. A cold shiver ran up his back as this one also reared up hissing threateningly. He was trapped!

He quickly looked around the clearing for some kind of weapon. There was nothing! No fallen branches, no stones, nothing! The only possibility was a small branch still attached to the fallen tree. If he could just break that off..

He ran over to the tree and grabbed the branch and was just about to start yanking at it when another snake slid over the trunk towards him. He squealed and just managed to get his hands away before the snake struck out. Then to his horror he saw more snakes of different types sliding from beneath the tree trunk towards him.

He was surrounded on three sides by snakes; the forth side was the dense bracken, thick with barbed brier tendrils.

He'd been scratched by brier before and knew just how sharp it could be. Forcing his way through it would tear his skin to shreds. However seeing all the snakes rapidly closing on him it looked a better bet. Steeling himself against the pain to come, he hurled himself across the clearing towards the only way out.

Hitting the brier was like going in slow motion. The wickedly sharp barbs stuck in his clothes and skin, making movement slow and arduous. His every movement was a fight against the clawing tendrils.

He was half way in when he first spotted them. Snakes, dozens of them, were slithering quickly towards him amid the tangled brier. He gave an involuntary yelp, and tried to back out the way he came in. The brier seemed to conspire against him, holding him in its steely grip as if to give his attackers time to reach their prey..

In a total panic now, Brian ignoring the thorns which torn his clothes and scoured his skin with deep ruts of open flesh, fought his way back into the clearing

Back where he started he rapidly swung his head from side to side checking on his adversaries. It was no use there was no way out! He was completely surrounded, his safe little haven in the centre of the clearing getting smaller and smaller.

Franticly he looked above for some low hung branched he could jump up to and pull himself to freedom . His last ray of hope dwindled in abject terror as he saw the branches above were already covered in crawling snakes. They'd ambushed him!

It's impossible! Snakes were solitary reptiles! They don't hunt in packs !!

But here they were, and by the way they were all moving towards him there wasn't any doubt what their intentions were.

Brian was in a gut wrenching panic now . They meant to have him he was sure! As he swung from side to side his hand brushed the water bottle in his jeans. He snatched it out of his pocket and looked at the small plastic bottle less than a third full. *A weapon!?*

He shook it up and down and was dismayed its lack of weight. Cursing himself for drinking so much, he gripped the bottle by the neck he swung it to and fro. It wasn't much but it felt good to have some kind of weapon against his hunters. He scoured the clearing for the thinnest congregation of snakes. The far path only had three snakes guarding its entrance. Brian marched towards them, bottle in hand. If he could just manage to swat them out of the way even for a second, he could jump past them and be away.

As he reached them, one of them reared up and struck at him. Brian managed to parry its strike with the bottle, then swinging it back caught the snake on the head, knocking it to one side.

One down. Two to go.

The other two joined the attack. Brian was swinging frantically now, catching the snakes before they could strike.

It's going to work! I'll beat the little bastards yet!!

He was just about to jump over the last snake, when he stopped in horror as a dozen or more snakes poured out through the undergrowth in front of him. Another trap! They'd lured him here deliberately! So shocked was he that for just a second he hesitated in his swings. In the next instant he felt a sharp pain in his bottom calf. He looked down in horror to see a snake with its fangs buried deep in his calf.

Brian screamed, hopping round in circles on one foot he desperately tried to shake it free

“Get off me..Get off ,Get OFF!!”

When that failed he began beating it with the water bottle. As he beat at the tenacious creature he felt another sting in his upper thigh of the other leg. The plastic bottle finally burst splashing its contents harmlessly over the snake.

Abandoning the broken bottle he grabbed the snake behind its head and squeezed for all he was worth, forcing its jaws apart. Once he'd managed to unhooked it he threw the snake as far away as possible. He grabbed for the other one still attached to his thigh, whist desperately trying to dance away from the rest of them as yet another one struck out, this time only catching his jeans.

He rid himself of the last snake and looked again for a way out. There was nowhere that the snakes hadn't covered. There was nothing for it he'd just have to run the gauntlet as fast as he could, and hope he didn't take to many bites.

He tried to run, but his leg burning with venom, refused to move. The toxins in his leg had all but total paralyzed it. He knew he had to get away before his other leg was affected. If he should fall down...?

He limped as fast as he could across the clearing, dragging his one leg like a piece of dead meat .He could feel his other leg going numb.

Please God! Let me get out!

He was three parts across when something fell out of the trees on to his shoulder. Instinctively he turned to look, just in time to see the snake open its mouth and bury its fangs into his cheek.

Brian screamed again and without the strength left to squeeze its jaws open, tore it from his face, taking a large chunk of his cheek with it.

The burning in his other leg was getting worse by the second and, realizing he'd never make it across, diverted to the fallen tree in the hopes of getting off the ground.

He'd almost made it to the tree when his other leg gave out. He stood for a moment on dead legs swaying back and forth in front of the fallen trunk. Finally with an almost seemingly inevitability, he crashed backwards on to the forest floor.

Immediately they were at him. Strike after strike. The pain was so bad it ceased to matter anymore. Except for a little movement in his neck he was completely immobilized.

He waited resignedly for the coup-de-grace, the final strikes to the head. It never came! The snakes slid from his body and coiled on the ground as if waiting.

Suddenly he heard something in the near distance. Bracken being pushed aside as something moved towards him. He managed to lift his head a little and looked down his body in the direction of the sound, and his blood turned cold as something huge, something monstrous pushed itself into view some twelve feet away.

Brian recognized it instantly. A Snake! Only this snake was much, much bigger! Its head was at least two feet across. Its skin was a kaleidoscope of colours, mirroring all the different snakes that surrounded him. As it emerged from the undergrowth it slowly sidled its way towards him. All the other snakes suddenly became very animated, and as one slithered towards it.

Brian thought they were going to attack the interloper which was threatening to take their prey

He was wrong! On reaching the giant snake they brushed against its sides as if caressing it.

The giant snake for its part lifted its head and swayed from side to side like a cat having its chin rubbed and hissed contentedly. And then they were gone, leaving the giant snake alone with the prostrate Brian.

The snake continued towards him. It had travelled twelve feet, yet most of its oak tree thick body was still in the undergrowth.

Even in his terror he wondered how such a large snake could hide itself without ever being seen. But as he looked closer he could see, it wasn't just coming out of the undergrowth, it was coming out from under the ground. Yard after yard of it slithered from the hole and still there was no sign of it tapering down.

The snake's head was almost touching his feet now. It flicked out its foot long tongue and tasted the air around him.

“Go away “ L..leave m..ee alone!” Brian whimpered.

The snake nuzzled his feet with its nose, and then slowly it opened its mouth wide and began to slide its mouth over his dead legs,

The snake's mouth inched over his ankles.

Oh dear God NO!

The snake opened its mouth and the undulating muscles in its body drew him further inside.

Brian tried to kick out at the monstrous praetor, but his paralyzed legs refused to move.

Another undulation and it was up to his knees. Although his muscles could no longer move, the nerve endings in his skin were very much still functioning. He could feel the wetness of its mouth dampening his jeans, feel the muscles in its mouth squeezing his legs together, and the thousands of small teeth snagging his clothes as it pulled itself up over his body

This can't be happening. It CAN'T!!

Another wave and it was up to his hips. Here it stopped, moving its head from side to side as if to get a better purchase on its prey.

It's stuck!!

Hope rushed through him in wash of relief as he realized that no matter how big the snake was, its mouth wasn't wide enough to swallow him.

He was already thinking of ways he might still escape, and when he did he was going to beat this piece of shit to a pulp.

There was an ominous loud 'click', and he looked down in horror to see the snakes jaw unhinge and the skin on the sides of its mouth stretch wider and wider.

He was suddenly dragged deeper up to his waist into the living coffin.

Brian began to cry! “No please . No Pleassssse” He whimpered as the next muscular spasm drew him in up to his neck. He could feel the warmth of its body wetly through his ‘T’ shirt and the folded up fangs pressing into his chest.

He looked into the face of his nemesis. Two bright yellow orbs with a jet black pupil stared back. They were at least three inches in diameter and as cold and merciless as a demon from hell.

One more swallow, he knew that's all it would take. And then.....?

He shut his eyes and tried not to think what it would be like to be swallowed alive. But the image of being inside its dark wet interior, of drawing in copious amounts of snake saliva as he desperately tried to draw breath refused to leave him. How long would he last before he was either crushed or suffocated? He didn't know. But he knew he'd find out very soon.

He felt the snake's muscles contract as they rippled up his body for one last gulp. In abject terror he opened his mouth and gave out one last piecing scream

“ARGGGGGGGHHHHhhhhh...ummffffhhhh”

At the sound of the scream a startled bird flew from its nest with a warning cry of its own, circled the tree, and then landed back in its nest.

After that, apart from the soft slithering noise of something slipping back into the ground, the forest was peaceful once more.

THE END.

ALL THAT GLISTENS

“There are worse things in life than death”

Anon

A golden rose! It was perfect in every detail, from the needle sharp thorns, down to the velvety under surface of its leaves.

Every day Mark Danvers spent hours under the wary gaze of the Gallery attendant, standing in front of its glass case. Staring through his shabbily dressed reflection, to the exquisite work of art within he was enthralled not so much by its perfection, but by all the things its gold could bring.

All his dreams of fast cars and even faster women floated tantalizingly just a thickness of glass away.

It was worth a king's ransom. Hell! Even melted down, there was enough gold there for him to live on easy street for years.

Inside, a large white card emblazoned with ornate copperplate writing announced.

'A Miles Tranter Creation'.

Mark hated that card, its shiny red letters with their fancy squiggles and curls, wormed through his insides like hungry maggots.

It wasn't fair! Here he was unemployed, broke and without even the price of a packet of fags in his pocket. Whilst the likes of Miles Tranter could waste all that gold on a bloody rose! It just wasn't *fair*!

Mark determined there and then to do something to redress the balance. To put matters right once and for all!

And get *his* share!

Mark moved out from the deep tree shadows just far enough for the moonlight to illuminate the page he'd torn from a telephone book.

He looked up and frowned, the rambling old house at the end of the drive, hardly looked promising. Stuck as it was in the middle of field miles away from anywhere. Amid barren grasslands and skeletal woods it looked more

like the house from the film 'Psycho' than the home of a famous sculptor.

Still it *was* a long shot. All the other Tranters checked out zero, this was the last chance.

"Bastards probably ex directory." he cursed, screwing the paper up into a hard ball and flinging it away in contempt.

"Can't have the likes of us 'riffraff' bothering Mr- high and bloody mighty-Tranter!" he hissed under his breath

He sighed miserably, "What the hell! I may as well take a look anyway".

Crouching low he dodged across the gravel drive, each step sounding like a noisy crisp eater in the back row of a cinema. Then slowly he made his way through the shadows to the back of the house. A solitary light burned in an upstairs window, creating the image of a very old and hungry, battle scarred predator that had learned to sleep with one eye open.

Mark standing by the kitchen window turned and checked behind him.

His heart skipped a beat as something dark moved through the trees. Something large! Something moving very fast!

His muscles tensed, adrenaline surged through his body, the beat of his heart accelerating till it felt like a bird caught in his throat struggling to get out.

Mark glanced up at the wind blown sky, and exhaled deeply with relief as he spied the rapidly eclipsing cloud just before it plunged the world into total darkness. His heart still beating like a trip hammer, Mark chided himself for being so easily spooked. But then he stopped and frowned. Perhaps it's an omen though? Perhaps he should just turn around and leave?

Then suddenly the cloud continued its journey and once again silver light played over the ground, chasing shadows back to their lairs robbed of prey.

Mark snorted, "Omens? Huh! I'll believe in witches and goblins next!"

Turning back to the window he slid the blade of the knife, he'd so wisely decided to bring, between the frame and the post. Then sliding it up, tripped the latch, swung the window open and entered the house. Tiptoeing around the rooms playing his torch over tables and shelves his spirits sank even further. No gold!

Useless! Another dead-end!

He was just about to leave through the window, when warned by the sound of approaching footsteps, managed to dodge quickly behind the door as it swung open.

The light clicked on and Marks heart leapt into his throat as peering between the door and jamb, he recognized from pictures in the papers, the

squat bald headed man who'd entered the room.

It was Miles Tranter!

Wearing a white coat that reached halfway down his calves, the sculptor, carrying a small Japanese Bonsai tree in one hand, moved across the kitchen in quick mincing little steps.

"Hmmmph!" Mark snorted silently, "*Might have known. Poofter!*"

Miles Tranter checked the lock on the back door, and then took a quick furtive look out through the window before closing the curtains.

Mark sent up a silent prayer that he'd shut the window behind him when he entered, then sent up a second as he prayed that Miles Tranter wouldn't look behind the door.

He didn't! Instead, satisfied he couldn't be seen from outside, Miles Tranter turned to the welsh dresser opposite, twisted the third cup hook along, and stood aside as the dresser rumbled slowly away from the wall. Mark watched in astonishment as Miles entered the concealed underground basement and closed the dresser behind him.

A secret cache! No wonder there wasn't any gold to be seen! Crafty old bastard! Mark knew he ought to leave and come back when Tranter was out, but he was curious. He put his ear against the dresser, it seemed quiet. Tentatively he reached up and turned the cup hook. Holding on tightly he eased the dresser open as quietly as possible and found himself at the top of a flight of worn stone steps.

An acrid aroma of chemicals wafted up from below, reminding him briefly of when as a boy he'd broken into the school lab looking for something to steal. That had proved a waste of time. But this! This looked a lot more promising. Wrinkling his nose against the smell he closed the dresser behind him and keeping close to the wall slowly descended.

At the bottom he found a large room its rough stone walls almost hidden behind ranks of shelving. Most holding equipment, test tubes, pipettes, Bunsen burners and more the nature of which he couldn't even guess at. Other shelves held books, ancient tomes some as thick as a mans thigh. In the centre, Miles Tranter stood busily fussing around a long bench covered with glass vials of different coloured liquids. Yards and yards of tubing spiralled up on a metal framework before him. On the floor large demijohns bound in straw casks stood idly collecting cobwebs.

Mark ducked behind one of the demijohns and watched as Miles Tranter worked at the bench mixing, heating and distilling various foul-smelling chemicals.

After almost an hour crouched in his hiding place, Mark's knees felt like two mounds of molten lead. He tried rubbing the rapidly spreading cramp

from his legs, but froze when he heard Tranter curse under his breath.

He peered over the demijohn and saw Miles Tranter rummaging in a cupboard beneath the bench. On its top stood two beakers one full of purplish thick sludge, whilst the other, only a third full, held a watery pink liquid.

He watched as the sculptor, muttering bad temperedly to himself, searched the cupboard. Then suddenly with a satisfying "Arh!" Stood up and placed a bottle and a large wok shaped bowl on the bench. Marks mouth fell open in shock. Both were made of gold!

Cramp forgotten and his mouth feeling suddenly very dry, Mark watched as Miles poured both liquids into the bottle, stopper it, and then quickly back away.

The bottle began to vibrate, slowly at first, but steadily increasing, beating out a louder and louder tattoo as it danced across the wooden bench. So loud that Mark ducked down, convinced it was on the point of exploding, or at the very least firing its stopper like a bullet into the ceiling. But after a few seconds it subsided and all was quiet.

Miles lifted the stopper and poured a few drops into the bowl. It was the colour of blood!

Carefully replacing the stopper he then took the Bonsai tree and dropped it into the solution.

Mark almost retched as vile metallic fumes drifted across the room. The smell was accompanied by a thick *sucking* sound that seemed to bounce off the walls surrounding him, passing through his innards, like a deep growl.

Next, Miles using a pair of tongs lifted the tree out of the basin and dipped it into a sink full of water set into the bench. After swishing it around for a few minutes he held it up to the light. It shone with the lustre of gold!

Plating! Mark was stunned. Then a wry smile crept across his face. "The crafty old fart's plating things and passing them off as sculptures!" he muttered to himself, and then almost laughed out loud. "'The great sculptor!' 'The great artist!' Huh, 'The great con artist' more likes!"

His smile withered into a sneer, his good humour evaporating into a growing anger, as realization sunk in. It was a cheat! All his effort, all the risk, and for what? A few quid's worth of gilt plating!

He'd expose him. Yeah!.... No... Better still. Blackmail!

He rubbed his hands in glee. *Not a dead loss after all.* All he had to do was get his hands on the tree as proof, and he was home free.

The distant ringing of a telephone interrupted his thoughts as Miles Tranter, tutting in annoyance, put down the tree and disappeared up the steps.

Taking his chance, Mark rushed to the bench and grabbed the tree. And

nearly dropped it. It was very heavy!

He stared at it in disbelief. It couldn't be! Could it? He took out his knife and scraped its surface. Gold!

Then with his heart thudding in his chest, he frantically cut right through its trunk. Inside he could see and even count its rings of growth, rings that were now solid gold!

Mark stood motionless, staring dumbfounded at the two halves in his hand. He couldn't believe it, but somehow Miles Tranter had discovered the alchemist dream of centuries past.

The transmutation of lead into gold. Only he had gone one step better, he could do it with *wood*!

"WHO THE HELL ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?"

Mark looked up as if in a dream as Miles Tranter waddled up to him, his hips swinging duck like.

"You're trespassing!" he continued in his peculiar high pitched voice, "this is private property, I'll have the law...!" he stopped his mouth forming a perfect O as his gaze dropped to Marks hands. Confused Mark followed his gaze; saw the tree in one hand and the knife in the other.

Fear gripped him as the full implications hit him. Armed robbery, threatening with a deadly weapon! They'd throw the book at him!

"You won't get away with it you know" Miles Tranter said slowly backing away, his baby fat skin visibly paling.

"Hey look I don't mean...." mark said opening his arms in supplication.

"DON'T WAVE THAT THING AT ME!!!" Miles screeched as he took a quick step back, fear oozing out of every pore.

Mark followed trying to calm him "I won't hurt you! I was just curious that's all. I..I..." he stopped, anger once more rearing its ugly head, *"Oh hell! Go on then!"* he yelled defiantly, "Call the police! I'm sure they'll be very interested in this cellar *and* this...sculpture?"

Miles Tranter stopped retreating, his eyes darting from Mark to the two halves of the gold tree in his outstretched hand. Looking up into Marks smirking face his gaze narrowed suspiciously.

"And if I don't report you, you will forget what you've seen and just go away?"

Mark laughed, "Well.. I could be persuaded. Perhaps if you were to offer some... how shall we put it, remuneration? To help me forget. Say... Once a month?"

"So that's it! Blackmail!" He spat the last word out as if it tasted bad. He

came up close to Mark, "Why should I give you anything? Nobody will ever believe you!"

Mark tossed the tree pieces in his hand and smiled at Tranter,

"They will when they see this."

"See what? A sculpture? What's so damning about that?"

"Ah but it's not a sculpture is it? O.K from outside it looks like one, but tell me Mr. Clever Clogs, how are you going to explain how you managed to sculpture the inside?" he held the tree trunk forward showing the intricate array of rings and knots. "Hmmm? Oh yes Mr. Clever- bloody- Clogs, you'll pay alright. As long as I've got this, you'll pay!!"

Mark could see the doubt in the sculptors' eyes and knew he'd won. Finally!

With a triumphant laugh he tossed the tree parts a little higher.

Miles Tranter struck like a Cobra. In the blink of an eye, he snatched the tree out of the air, lifted the lid to a container standing next to the bench and dropped it in. Mark momentarily stunned by the speed of such little fat man, pushed him out of the way and snatched the lid off again.

Clouds of thick brown fumes billowed into his face stinging his eyes and searing his nostrils. He dropped the lid which clanged on the floor like a huge doomsday bell, and backed away coughing and rubbing his eyes. Then with eyes streaming tears he looked into the smug face of Miles Tranter.

"What have you done? *What's in there?!*"

"Just another of my little creations. Sulphur Quadoxyide acid, the ultimate in corrosives. It can reduce anything even gold to sludge in seconds. In fact the only thing it can't dissolve is its container and that took me longer to invent than it did the solution."

"Came in quite useful for the disposal of my failures, before that is I perfected the process."

"So you see my dear blackmailing friend, all your evidence is gone. 'Poof!'" he made an expansive fountain shape with his hands then added with a sneer. "Now unless you leave this instant I'm afraid I'll have to report you to the police."

"Not so fast!" Mark interrupted, "that's not the end of it. What about all you're other so called creations? The rose for instance. All they have to do is cut it open and they'll know I'm telling the...."

He was cut off by a shrill feminine giggle that ran around the room like a mischievous sprite.

"You really think anyone is going to destroy a famous work of art on the

ramblings of a bedraggled loser like *you!!*"

He moved in closer, the smile twisting into a contemptuous leer, "And that's all you are, a pathetic nobody, with a mind consisting of one half used brain cell. One of natures all time losers!"

He snorted, the amused smile returning like an emerging worm. "And you thought you could get the better of me!" His laughter began silently in short quick gasps, slowly becoming peppered with the same girl like giggle.

Mark felt the colour drain from his face, a steel rod telescoped up his spine bringing him to his full height.

"Don't laugh at me!!" he hissed through clenched teeth, his hand tightening on the knife handle as if it were the throat of his mentor.

But the sculptor oblivious, bowed up and down with laughter, his podgy face with its screwed up eyes swayed in front of Mark like an asthmatic Buddha.

"I SAID DON'T LAUGH AT ME!!"

Tranter looked up through tear filled eyes, and with a voice filled with cold laughter spat "You don't frighten me anymore with that pathetic little knife! Now get out of my house. Go on *GET OUT!!* You no good loser before I really call the police."

Mark hesitated, unsure; Tranters pale face loomed before him as if made from chiselled lard, one fat lip curling back in derision. It was all going wrong! Somehow he was losing out *again!*

A small voice whispered at the base of his brain one single damning word, over and over again....

Loser... LOSER... **LOSER!!!**

Tranters face seemed to become whiter, its shape changing from round to square, forming itself into that large white card with its bold red letters, '*A MILLIS TRANTER TREASON.*'

Letters which squirmed and coiled, knotting into a single red spot that grew, filling his vision with a hot volcanic mist. A buzzing rose in his ears like a trapped bluebottle, as hot blood pounded through his head, hammering, hammering. Till only two things existed in Marks universe, the burning curtain of colour and that single accusing word bouncing round the inside of his skull, getting louder and louder.

..... LOSER!!!

"Nooooooooooooo!!!" he screamed as the all encompassing red haze possessed him.

Then slowly the haze began to recede, the room with its smoke stained ceiling and ranks of shelving slowly appearing around the edges, forming out of the pounding colour seeping from his temples. And still it shrank a huge powder puff of crimson collapsing into infinity. Miles Tranters face appeared next, his features frozen with a look of amazement. Shrinking.... shrinking.. The haze finally condenses into a single form. A poppy pinned to Tranters chest.

Mark blinked, stared hard at the small red flower in bewilderment. He couldn't remember seeing Tranter wearing it before? Why would he suddenly put one on?

Then as if in reverse the poppy began to grow, blooming first into a rose, then into a large melting chrysanthemum, its petals dripping molten red wax as it rapidly blossomed against the white lab coat.

Mark watched the expanding scarlet circle dumbly. His gaze slowly drifting reluctantly down to his own hand. He swallowed what felt like powdered glass when he saw the knife still firmly locked in his white knuckled grip, its blade jutting out like an accusing finger, still slick with its covering of warm blood.

Tranters hand fluttered up to his chest, his podgy fingers dipping into the blood like a bird alighting to drink. He slowly turned his blood stained palm towards him and stared in shocked silence as the bright red liquid ran down his fingers forming a small sticky pool in the centre of his hand. He looked up at Mark, his eyes wide, mouth working seemingly on the point of saying something but all he could do was hold out the bloody digits in stunned disbelief.

They both stood statue like, willing it to be an illusion, a trick of the light, anything but what it was!

A low keening noise broke the silence; Mark looked up to see Tranters face crumpling with realization. The keening became a wail as Miles Tranter, clasping a hand over the wound turned and staggered towards the stairs.

Now realization swamped over Mark too like an icy wave, terror gripped his insides and twisted. If Miles Tranter survives and *tells!!.....*

He couldn't let that happen. If Tranter survived then what remained of his own life would perish in some rotting prison cell. No. He couldn't let that happen, not at any price!.

Steeling himself, he marched determinedly after his prey, turning the knife as he did to hold it in a closed fist.

Miles Tranter had just reached the bottom step when Mark struck. The knife came down a little high taking him in the shoulder. Tranter screamed and dropped to the floor, the knife firmly wedged in the deltoid muscle.

To Marks amazement his victim ignored it and began crawling up the steps.

Mark bit his lip nervously. He hadn't expected this, he'd imagined it would be like in the movies, one quick stab, a last strangled gasp from the victim and it's all over! But here was Tranter definitely not dead and still trying to escape.

He bounded up the steps after him and dropped onto the others back. Tranters face smashed into the stone step, splitting his lip and gums with a sickening crack. But astonishingly it didn't stop him. Hoisting himself back up to hands and knees he continued ever upwards, with Mark, legs straddling his waist riding him like a horse.

Holding on to Tranters coat collar with one hand, Mark grabbed the knife and frantically yanked it to and fro trying to dislodge it. Beneath him Miles Tranter screamed in agony as the blade sliced back and forth through the muscle.

Then suddenly it was free, coming out with a 'slurp' like an old man sipping tea from a saucer.

Aiming lower he brought the blade down with all his strength. It penetrated quarter of an inch and stopped with a bone shuddering thud as it hit the shoulder blade. His hand slid down the slippery handle, over the blade, cutting cleanly into the soft pads of his own fingers.

Stung by the sudden pain, Marks temper flared. Pulling his sleeve over his hand he clasped the knife once more and again brought it down hard! This time it hit the shoulder blade a glancing blow and skidded off, tearing through the fabric of the coat and slicing up a large flap of flesh. For just an instant Mark saw the gleam of white bone and cheesy fat tissue, before a tide of blood erased it.

Mark struck again and again, a frenzied jockey lashing his mount. And still Tranter moved ever closer to the top of the steps. Sobbing uncontrollably between pig like squeals as the blade lashed down. Mumbling pleading words that went unheeded, he dragged himself up to the penultimate step.

In desperation Mark released his hold on the coat, put both hands round the knife handle and yelling with frustration used all his weight to bury the knife up to the hilt in the centre of Tranters back.

"Die you bastard.... DIE!!!"

Tranters scream ended with a thick bubbling noise as bright red blood spewed from his mouth. Arching his back like a rearing stallion, Tranter reached out a quivering hand towards his goal. The fingers fluttered briefly above the top step, before collapsing onto the stone like wet putty.

Mark sank as the body beneath him, giving out a final gurgling breath,

deflating like a punctured balloon.

Raising himself off the bloody carcass, Mark swallowed hard forcing down his rapidly rising gorge. He looked down at his blood stained hands and saw a small lump of red jelly like flesh sticking to the back of his hand.

And suddenly his mouth was full. He turned and stumbled down the steps. Vomit spraying from between pursed lips and nostrils in a torrent of yellow scum.

All the strength seemed to drain from his legs and he crumpled to his knees, resting his bowed head against the wall.

The cold damp stone felt good against his burning forehead.

Spitting out small bitter lumps of half digested food caught beneath his tongue, he tried to rid his mouth of the foul taste and replace it with clean refreshing air. Only to find the stench of his own sick awaiting him causing his stomach to turn over and retch again violently.

Flinging himself away from his own mess, one hand tight across mouth and nose, he staggered to the centre of the room.

He stood there his shocked mind, numb, trying to recall how it had all gone so tragically wrong. Telling him, it was all just a horrible nightmare.

Then his gaze fell on a foot poking out from the shadow on the stairs. He frowned at it, his addled thoughts refusing to accept what he saw. Then out of the shadow next to it something dark and thick began to trickle down the steps and form a glutinous pool at the bottom.

Mark moved forward to examine this strange viscous liquid with its deep red hue.

Suddenly he knew what it was, dark memories came rushing back to swamp him.

Tranter's final scream replayed in his mind, piercing like a hot needle as the feel of metal penetrating flesh again became alive in his hands.

He thrust a fist in his mouth to stifle his own scream, a scream that quickly turned to a cry of anguish. Shaking his head in despair, a strangled "Noooooooo.." escaping from his tight throat as with eyes locked on the expanding pool of blood he slowly crumpled to his knees. Then with a long forlorn wail that echoed around underground room like an open sore, he collapsed onto his face, sobbing uncontrollably into its cold cobbled surface. With finger nails scratching painfully into its stony cracks he created his own small muddy pools beneath his cheek as he lay there crying like a baby.

Gradually, unable to except the situation any longer he rolled into a ball, covered his head with his arms, then shutting out all the horror that surrounded him, slept.

CHAPTER TWO

NIGHTMARES

He awoke shivering. It must have snowed in the night because his room felt so cold and his bed felt like it was made of ice cubes.

He opened one eye. Blinked, and then blinked again. Stone? He was lying on a stone floor, what the.....?

And then it all came crashing back. He closed his eye again quickly, hoping to follow the rapidly dwindling sleep away from this room of horror. He pinched his eyes tighter and tighter, but it was no use. The anaesthetizing sleep was gone.

He slowly uncoiled and sat up, opening his eyes reluctantly. Nothing had changed. The single light bulb still gave out its cancerous yellow light. On the bench a Bunsen burner continued to burn, its small blue flame hissing in the silence. By his side the acid containers lid lay as it had fallen.

And over by the stairs Tranters foot still protruded from the shadows.

Only the blood had changed. Where once there was the small bright red puddle. Now a much bigger and darker, tar like pool covered the floor.

Mark got shakily to his feet, his hands trembling like autumn leaves in the first big wind of November.

He rubbed his mouth nervously. Then turned quickly spitting out the flecks of dried blood he'd inadvertently pushed between his lips.

"God I need a fag!"

He fumbled in his pockets and brought out a crumpled pack of Park Drive. Please let there be some left, he wished as he flicked the pack open.

There were three. The first one drooped like an impotent man as he drew it out of the carton, its shaft broken in the centre. The second fared no better.

Cursing he threw them away, and then slowly, tenderly drew the last one out. It was bent but not broken. Gently straightening it out, he put it between parched lips and using the Bunsen burner lit it.

He sucked in the hot smoke like a drowning man sucking in his last breath. He coughed explosively a couple of times, then dragged heavily again.

"God that's good".

He settled himself down on a stool, his nerves steadying with every pull on the cigarette.

By the time he'd finished it he knew what he had to do.

First he had to dispose of the body. Then erase all signs of his presence. There was nothing to tie him in with Miles Tranter, so provided he could get away clean, he was home free!

But how? He didn't fancy the idea of dragging the body outside and burying it. Besides the first thing the police would do was search the grounds, and any freshly turned soil would be like a beacon. No that was out.

He couldn't set fire to it either; someone might see the flames and call the fire Brigade. So how?

As he looked around the cellar his eyes fell on the tank of acid. Of course! What had Tranter said 'eat through anything in seconds'?

But his euphoria sank as quickly as it had arisen as he realized the tank was too small to take the body. A ball of ice grew in his stomach freezing his insides, as it dawned on him that he would have to cut the body up and feed it into the tank piece by piece.

He didn't think he could do it. The memory of how it felt, the knife cutting into flesh, the warm blood flowing over his hands, was still vivid in his mind.

But he could see no other way. So reluctantly, he rose and walked over to the body. Taking a deep breath he grabbed hold of its ankle and dragged it into the light.

Tranter rolled onto his side, his blank eyes staring up accusingly at him, his mouth locked in a hideous silent scream.

Mark backed away, his eyes fixed on the body. He could see Tranter rising, staggering forward with the knife still protruding from his back. He could hear the high-pitched giggle echoing around the room...

..Loser.... LOSER.....LOSER!

Mark screamed and covered his eyes.

Can't see me now I'm hiding!

After what seemed an eternity, he peered through his fingers.

Tranter was still lying on the floor, his glassy eyes seeing nothing.

Mark took off his coat, crept forward, and then hastily threw it over the head.

Nothing moved.

He instantly felt better. The anonymous bulk with no head didn't seem half as threatening. Still, he hesitantly approached and kicked the body. It felt like

kicking a sandbag!

Satisfied he was well and truly dead. Mark stepped behind the body, knelt and took hold of the knife. It was stuck fast!

Mark gripping the handle with two hands braced his foot against the corpses back and yanked it free.

The coat fell from its face as it rolled back onto its back.

Mark looked into the face. It was hard to believe that only a few hours ago, this face had been alive and talking to him and now....

Marks face tightened in grim determination, what's done is done! And now he had a job to do.

He spent the next few minutes cutting away all the clothing.

Now came the hard part. Biting his lip till it almost bled. Mark took a firm hold of Tranters cold wrist and pulled it, stiff and unyielding, away from the body with a loud crack. Then placing the edge of the knife onto the shoulder took a deep breath and cut deeply.

The tissue was remarkably resilient, like cutting leather. Finally he hit bone and realized with despair he'd started to low down and had missed the joint.

He cut again high up. Missed!

He tried again. It was hard to see what he was doing now, layers of churned up flesh tended to cover the joint. His breath became ragged and he could hear himself starting to whimper. Tears began to roll down his cheeks as he began slashing at the shoulder whilst twisting and pulling at the wrist with the other hand.

"Come off!...Come on you bastard!!.. COME OFF!!"

Suddenly his stomach could take no more, and with a cry of anguish he threw himself away from the body.

It was no good he couldn't do it. He couldn't go back and try that again!

With sudden resolution he took hold of the acid container and dragged it over to the body.

"If Mohamed won't come to the mountain...."

Using his foot he pushed the container over, its contents splashing over the floor and body in a minor tidal wave.

Immediately a loud hissing filled the room. Clouds of fumes belched into the air as the acid set to work.

Mark looked on in fascinated horror as the acid ate into Tranters body.

The body writhed and wriggled as the flesh boiled and bubbled under it.

One splash had fallen over the stomach, and was quickly eating its way through, exposing blue white intestines that were even now sliding out of the hole the acid had created, like a long snake abandoning a sinking ship only to boil in a scalding sea.

Out of the frying pan into the fire!

Then suddenly the reaction stopped. The acid either draining away from the body as it followed the slight fall in the floor, or being totally consumed in its own residue.

Tranter lay there in a layer of thick sludge. The back of the head and body were now unnaturally flat, as if it had been sliced down the centre and stuck to the floor with a layer of blackcurrant jam.

Another botched job! Another failure!

Mark searched the cellar for more acid. None!

In desperation he began kicking over and smashing all the demijohns he could find. All to no avail.

The entire floor was awash with chemicals, tainting the air and making breathing difficult.

The almost two dimensional Tranter still lay staring up at the ceiling, only now the grimace on its face, distorted by seared holes burnt by flying acid, looked more like a mocking smile.

Mark flopped onto the stool in defeat. It was the story of his life.

Never the breaks, never the luck!

He closed his eyes as he recalled just how bad a hand life had dealt him.

Unhelpful teachers with a downer on him. Always picking on him just because he was better than the others. Not that they could see it of course.

So he took a little time off now and again! So what? All that dumb shit they tried to cram down him, What good was it?

History: A bunch of old foggies that died when?

Who gives a fuck!

Geography: The capital of India is?

Bradford! Hee hee hee!

Stand in the corner Danvers!

Bastards!!

Algebra! For Christ sake! $A \times B = C$.

What a load of crap!

If they wanted to teach arithmetic. Why didn't they teach us how to work out the winnings on a five to two winner?

That! At least would have been useful!

Work was no better. Forman always hounding him. Do this! Do that! Clean this! Carry that!

Couldn't even take ten minutes to study form in the shit house without the vindictive little pricks come banging on the door!

Well he'd told them where they could stick their bloody job.

Then the snotty nosed cow down the dole office had refused to give him any money.

"Sorry sir but as you left of your own accord. I'm afraid..."

Six weeks! No money for six weeks!

Course now. If he'd painted his face black?

"Yes sir, no sir, stick it up my arse? Certainly! How far would sir like to shove it?!"

Bastards! How was he surpassed to manage with no money? How could he take his bird out without some dosh!

His head sunk a little lower as Mavis's face floated behind his eyelids. He was there at the bus stop again. She was wearing that grey two piece suit that he hated so much. The one that buttoned all the way up to her neck. Her tits couldn't have been safer locked in the Tower of London!

He should have guessed when he saw her wearing it, what was to come. That plus the way she'd been stand offish all through the date.....

...."So 'ow about it?" he'd said, sliding his hands over her skirt and cupping the smooth round cheeks of her bottom. "A quick ten minutes in the ally before your bus comes. Ay?"

He pushed and lifted his middle finger into the crack of her bum. Even through the fabric he could feel the heat of her.

He felt himself rising, growing, straining against the confines of his trousers, as the image of what lay just a few thin layers of material beneath his finger swirled into his mind.

She squirmed. Thinking she was responding, he pulled her on to him even more urgently. Pushing his hard throbbing shaft against the inside of her thigh.

"Come on Mav" he said nuzzling her neck, "just ten minutes. Come on! You know you want it!"

"No! I'm not messing about in some ally! What do you take me for?" she'd

said pushing his hand away.

"Arh come on Mav'. Just ten minutes. No one will see!"

"No, I told you. The bus will be here soon."

"Five minutes then?" He said undoing her top button, "Just a quick one."

She pushed him away, banging his head on the bus stop pole.

"I said NO!! Dammit! Now leave me alone!"

He knew she was spoiling for a fight. Knew he should keep calm and not give her any excuse. But still he heard himself shouting.

"What's-a-matter with you tonight? Got the *rags* on have yer?"

O-oh. Mistake!

Her head snapped round. Even the soft orange glow from the street lights, couldn't hide the visible blanching of her skin.

She glared at him, her chin working as she ground her teeth together. Her eyes travelled up and down him as if he were the biggest piece of dog shit in the world. Then without saying a word turned her back on him and watched for the bus to arrive.

"Er...I'm sorry Mav' I didn't mean...."

"I think its better we don't see each other anymore." she said softly.

He was thunderstruck, "What? No don't be silly, I said I'm sorry! Come on, it won't happen again, Honest!" he reached for her arm trying to turn her to face him. But she shrugged his hand away and continued to look up the road.

"I...I want to finish it."

The words bit into him, taking his breath away. He legs felt as if they would give way any second.

"No Mav' yer don't mean it. You *can't* mean it!"

"Look at me Mav'. Look at me!" he said pulling on her arm as she steadfastly ignored him.

"LOOK AT ME!" he yelled, and using all his strength he spun her round, pinning her against the post.

What he saw shocked him. She was scared!

Standing there with her handbag clutched protectively in front of her. Eyes like a mesmerized rabbit caught in the headlights of a speeding truck. A strangled whimpering sob peppering every breath. She wasn't just scared she was terrified.

"Don't hurt me. I'll call the police if you try and hurt me!"

"Hurt you? Mav' I'd never hurt you! You're the best thing that ever happened to me. Look I know I've been a bit of a prick lately, but we can work it out. Can't we?"

But already she was shaking her head. Still staring down at her handbag she administered the 'coup de grace'.

"I...I've found someone else!"

"W-w-what?"

"His names Russell. He's one of the junior managers where I work."

He let go of her, his arms sapped of strength.

"H-how long?"

She swallowed hard and glancing quickly over her shoulder searched the deserted street for rescue.

"It's been three weeks now since...."

"THREE WEEKS!?"

Just then the number thirty-three bus (her bus) turned the corner. As the brightly lit bus approached threatening to carry his one true love away forever, total panic jangled every nerve to fever pitch. He couldn't let her go! *Couldn't!!*

"Don't catch the bus Mav', please!" He looked up; the bus was only some sixty yards away. A few seconds at best.

"We have to talk!"

Forty yards.

"Mav' don't let it end like this!"

Twenty yards.

"Mav'. Pleeeeeeease!..... I love you"

There it was out. The one and only time he'd ever said those three little words to anyone.

The last throw of the dice.

The bus was less than ten yards away now and Mark could hear the driver changing down, getting ready to stop. When all of a sudden his prayers were answered. Mavis moved away from the stop, turning her back on the approaching bus.

There was a crunching of gears as the driver slammed the bus irritably back into a higher gear and sped by.

Mark felt the tension inside him lessen with every yard the bus made.

It was going to be all right.

In a few more minutes the bus was out of sight. With a deep-relieved sigh, Mark smiled at Mavis as he reached out to take her hand in his.

"I'm glad you decided to stay Mav'. We can work it out I know we can. I really do love you...."

In the films the heroine would have smiled in relief and thrown herself into his arms professing her own undying love.

But this wasn't a film. Mavis refused the hand and averting her gaze whispered. "But I... I don't love you!"

Mark felt like he'd been punched in the stomach.

"I'm sorry Mark, but nothings changed. I don't love you. I love Russell!"

All the tension reared its ugly head again like a gigantic boa constrictor crushing the small spark of hope that had briefly flickered.

"No I don't believe it! If there was someone else, you wouldn't be here with me tonight. And if you didn't think there was a chance we could work things out, you wouldn't have let the bus go?"

"There is someone else Mark and I let the bus go because I never intended to catch it!"

"I...I don't understand! You never intended to catch the bus? Then why in Gods earth are we standing here?"

"I'm waiting for Russell!"

The boa constrictor tightened its grip another notch.

He stood, mouth open, listening but not hearing, Mavis's voice coming from somewhere far away.

"He didn't want me to come tonight, but I told him I had to tell you face to face. I owed you that much."

"He only agreed on the condition that I let him come and pick me up afterwards."

Mark looked at the bus stop as if it were some monument. A full stop in his life.

"He's coming here?"

"Yes" Mavis peered at the town Hall clock in the distance.

"He should be here any time now."

Mark surveyed the deserted streets. Somewhere out there at this very moment, a stranger was on his way to steal his girl.

He turned back to Mavis, Jesus! Even in that suit she was something

special. Even its drabness couldn't disguise her luxurious figure. Petite and at the same time generous in all the right places. Nor the dark shadows hide the cat green eyes that peered out from beneath the perfectly styled auburn mane, rich and deep under the sodium lamps glare, with errant wisps glistening in the night air like spun gold.

Rumplestiltskin must have been very busy the day she was born. He thought irrationally.

He'd never though she would stick with him. Girls like that just didn't stick with guys like him. Losers!

Yet she had stuck with him. God knows why? But she had. And as the weeks rolled by, (Tonight would have been their three month anniversary) he'd begun to think that at last his luck had changed. That if *she* thought him good enough, then maybe, just maybe, he wasn't a loser after all.

And now as he stood there in the dark windy street. With his girl waiting anxiously for her Knight in white armour to carry her away from the loathsome dragon. He knew it was all some perverted joke, perpetrated by some malicious God who even now must be laughing fit to bust.

"Mav'... Why?"

She dropped her head, "I'm sorry Mark. It..... It just wouldn't work."

"But why Mav'?" he said shaking her by the shoulders. "WHY?!"

She looked at him beseechingly, "Oh Mark surely you can see we're two different people. You just like to amble along taking things as they come. Where as I have my career to think about. I've worked hard to get where I am, and I can't let..." She dropped her gaze again, her voice faltering.

".... Can't let a loser like me hold you back. Right?" he finished for her.

"I... I didn't say that" she whispered so unconvincingly his heart sank.

"Yeah maybe you're right. I have let things slip a bit. But I can change." He crouched trying to see into her bowed head, to make eye contact as if he could mysteriously hypnotize her into believing him.

"I'll get a job, and maybe go to night school! Yeah take a degree or sum'at. You'll be proud of me then. We could..."

"NO MARK IT'S OVER!! Finished." she turned away to face up the road. Don't say that Mav' you got to give it a...."

He was interrupted as a car turned into the top of the street, its headlights pinpointing them as it headed in their direction.

Mavis straightening herself up stepped closer to the kerb.

Panic flared through Mark like a bush fire.

"Please Mav' don't go. Give me a chance. Please!!" his voice was cracking, but he didn't care. It was all or nothing now. He'd wished now he'd treated her better when he had the chance. But now he would make up for it. He'd crawl if he had to. Just as long as she stayed with him!

As the car drew to a halt beside them, Mavis turned to face him one last time. Her eyes were heavy and he detected a slight hitch in her voice as she spoke, "I'm sorry but I love Russell. Goodbye Mark"

The driver's door opened and Mark knew, just knew! That the driver would be tall and handsome. Everything in fact that he wasn't.

He wasn't wrong!

The athletically built Russell walked around the front of the car. He was wearing pumped up trainers, stone washed Lee's, and a white polo necked jumper pushed up at the elbows showing off his muscular forearms. Though casual, it was a contrived casualness that suited him. Mark knew that he could never look that good no matter how hard he tried.

Russell brushed past Mark as if he didn't exist, taking Mavis's arm and leading her to the passenger door.

As Mavis started to enter the car, Marks self control slipped past the point of no return.

"MAVIS DON'T LEAVE ME. PLEEEASE!"

He dashed forward to try and stop her from leaving, and ran straight into Russell's hand planted firmly against his chest.

"Beat it Buster! She's with me now!" growled Russell, holding Mark at bay.

Mark dodged this way and that trying to dislodge the hand that gripped him. Desperately trying to see Mavis and beg for one last chance.

"MAVIS I LOVE YOU! MAVIS PLEASE DON'T DO THIS TO ME. PLEASE!"

He caught a glimpse of her through the windshield.

She was crying.

He briefly saw her puffy eyes with twin trails of wet mascara beneath, before she buried her face in her hands.

"MAVIS... MAVIS..."

Then suddenly he was slammed against the bus post, his feet barely touching the pavement. Russell's angry face loomed in front of him almost nose to nose.

"Leave her alone you worthless piece of shit or else!" Russell hissed at

him through clenched teeth, "You hear?"

"Y-You can't frighten me off. S-She'll come back to me!"

Russell's laugh was short and sharp. He smiled humourlessly at Mark, looking him up and down as if he was something written on a lavatory wall.

"What would a girl like Mavis want with a loser like you?"

Mark saw red. Everybody called him a loser, but not this time he'd show them. More importantly he'd show Mavis. Perhaps then she'd come back.

Oh Mark your soooo masterful

He swung at Russell with all the venom of his unhappy past.

And missed!

Russell moved easily to the side bringing his own right up through the middle.

Mark never saw it. But he felt it.

His nose just seemed to explode. Gold flashes danced across his vision. He shook his head to try and clear it, spraying blood in a flat arc.

He realized he was on the ground. He looked up just as the car pulled away from the kerb, its engine gunning.

"MAVIS!" he hauled himself to his feet and began to chase after the speeding car. "MAVISSSSSSSS!!"

But Mavis was gone.

He stopped in the middle of the deserted street staring dolefully in the direction they'd gone. Only a plume of exhaust fumes drifting slowly up into the silent night keeping him company.

He felt empty. The one good thing in his whole life was gone for good. He remembered how good she looked when she smiled, so alive so.... Wonderful.

The image changed to one of a tear-streaked face looking at him from behind a windscreen. He'd never meant to hurt her like that. Why did everything always have to go wrong?

Turning on his heels he trudged home to his empty flat.

Never the breaks. Never the luck.....

CHAPTER THREE

THE MIDAS TOUCH

He opened his eyes.

The nightmare was still there. The ravaged room with its stinking corpse. Only now he noticed the remains of the acid had finally eaten all the way through the stomach, exposing a near perfect circle of cobbled floor beneath.

The mint with the hole!

How had it all gone wrong?

Just a little bit of burglary, that's all it started out as! A few bits of gold, shavings, filings, some small piece he'd never have missed that's all he'd wanted. And now?

Humph! This is another fine mess you've got us into Stanley!

Anger flared inside him, "IT ISN'T FAIR!!" he yelled to the room. Then jumping off the stool marched up to the remains of Miles Tranter.

"IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT. YOU FAT BASTARD!!"

He kicked what was left of its shoulder in temper, and to his horror felt the dead flesh flop onto his foot like a wet rug as his toes slid beneath its raw edge.

He yanked his foot back with a cry of revulsion, and dragged out the shiny white bone of the upper arm.

He hastily stepped back, desperately flicking the end of his foot in an attempt to dislodge the pieces of red/black tissue that were stuck to the end of his shoe.

Scraping his foot on the floor, he backed up to the bench hurling abuse at the body on the floor as though it were lying there listening.

"IT'S YOUR OWN FAULT! YOU FUCKING SHORT ARSED LITTLE QUEER!!"

"I'M GLAD YOU'RE DEAD! YOU HEAR?!"

Only the echo of his voice answered as it rolled around the room.

Then with a scream of rage he snatched up the stool and swung it in a large arc at the apparatus on the bench. An avalanche of glass cascaded down sending razor sharp splinters flying across the room. Several pieces slashed his hands and face, only fuelling his anger even more. He swished the stool back and forth across the top of the bench in a demented fury clearing it completely.

He turned back to Tranter a maniacal smile drawn back over bared teeth. "How do you like that, you FUCKING FAT PIG?!" He yelled tossing the stool aside contemptuously.

"AND THIS!" he ran up to the shelves and began pulling pieces of

equipment out and dashing them against the floor. He was laughing hysterically now. "And we can't forget these can we *FATSO?!!*" He began ripping the bindings from the books, shredding their pages, and grinding them into the dirty floor with the heel of his shoe.

His anger gradually ebbed along with his strength.

He stood in the middle of the room, his victorious laughter slowly corrupting into the sobs of utter defeat.

Then he said quietly, almost pleadingly to the empty room.

"All I wanted was a bit of gold. That's all! Just something to give me a fresh start." He looked back at the mouldering corpse.

"Would it really have hurt you to give me just a little?"

"*WOULD IT!!? DEAR GOD!!* You could have made a mountain of gold out of a pile of horse shit if you'd wanted! Why then did all this have to happen?" he added sweeping his outstretched arms around the room.

No answer!

He looked above him, turning his attention to the God that had put a black mark against his name at birth.

"Couldn't you let me win just this once? *JUST THIS ONE LOUSY FUCKING TIME?!!*"

No answer!

He looked at the mess that surrounded him. Time to go.

He realized to late that it was useless to try and clean up. His fingerprints must be everywhere by now. But he didn't care; he was long past caring anymore. Besides he knew with his luck, no matter how thorough he was, he was bound to forget something.

"*Hey Sarge! There's a perfect thumbprint on this..*"

It was useless! The night's macabre twists and turns played through his mind. The seemingly small decisions that could have made all the difference, like:

Standing in the drive debating with him the pros and cons of bothering to check out the house.

Bad choice!

The second thoughts he'd had at the window.

Bad choice!

The decision not to come back later, but follow Miles Tranter down into his secret room.

Bad choic.....?

...*SECRET ROOM!!*

He began to laugh. Slowly at first but rising, growing louder and louder. Tears streaking down his face as he rocked with laughter.

What an idiot! A secret room!

All he had to do was make sure he shut the dresser behind him when he left, and they would probably never find it.

It had all been for nothing. The abortive dismemberment, the acid. All of it!

Just shut the dresser and walk away. Simple!

Chuckling and shaking his head at his own stupidity he made his way to the steps. He stopped at the foot of the steps and looked down at what was left of Miles Tranter. With a big smile on his face he gave it a mock salute saying,

"Bye! *SHIT HEAD!*"

His eyes scanned the room one last time as he turned to leave, and then stopped suddenly. His breath caught in his throat as something hidden under the wreckage caught his eye. Something shiny had glistened briefly. Something golden!

Hurrying over to the spot the glint had come from. He began sorting through the melee of broken bits.

And then he found it. The golden bowl!

"*YESSSS!*" He hugged it to his chest like a long lost child. His eyes closing in silent rapture. *GOLD!!*

With this everything could be different. He'd have money, friends. Who knows even Mavis might change her tune?

Of course he wouldn't get its full value. The back street 'fence's' would only give him a fraction of its true worth, but even so there'd still be more than...

A horrible thought sneaked into his mind. What if it's not solid gold? He'd only seen Tranter use the process on biological things. And this bowl clearly was once made of some kind of mineral. Perhaps it's only plated!

Already he could hear the Gods begin to titter.

He had to know, and he had to know now! The thought of carrying it all the way back to his flat, dreaming dreams of riches, only to find when he got there that it wasn't worth a damn, was too awful to contemplate.

He found his knife where he'd left it, lying next to Tranter's half-severed

arm. The handle looked and felt like it was covered with Marmite, the sort his mother used to give him as a child. Thick black and sticky!

But he didn't care, It could have been covered with the mashed brains of children and he'd still have gripped it as tightly. Only one thing mattered!

With bated breath he cut a thick shaving off the soft metal.

Solid Gold!!

With another triumphant, "YESSSSS!" he hurled the knife away and once again clutched the bowl fiercely to his chest.

Then another part of his brain clicked into gear.

Where was the bottle?

He placed the bowl carefully at the base of the steps and began to search through the wreckage for the missing bottle.

It was nowhere to be seen. He picked up and threw down with increasing frustration the pieces that littered the floor.

Where the hell was it? He looked around the room, nervously biting his lip. It had to be here somewhere. *It had to be!*

The bench! Perhaps it rolled under the bench?

He dropped to his knees and poked his head into the foot deep space beneath the bench.

The shadows under there were like a wad of solid soot.

He stuck his arm under, sweeping his hand back and forth anxiously.

His heart skipped a beat as his fingers closed over the neck of a bottle. He dragged it into the light. His eyes sparkled with the reflected light of gold!

He knelt there looking at it, his eyes straying occasionally to the bowl at the base of the steps. He couldn't believe his luck. TWO! Pieces of gold. He looked up at the ceiling smiling defiantly. "WHO'S A WINNER NOW?" He yelled holding the bottle aloft for the Gods to see.

And something sloshed inside the bottle!

Marks mouth dropped open. It *couldn't* be.

No! His luck couldn't have changed *that much!*

He lowered the bottle to head height, then holding it firmly between two hands, held it to his ear and jiggled it.

Slop-plop...plop.....Slop-plop!

It was true. There was some of the miraculous liquid left!

Now Marks mind really began to race. Forgotten were the bowl and bottle.

He had bigger fish to fry now. Much, *MUCH!* Bigger fish indeed. We weren't talking a few measly grand anymore. Now we were talking of potentially *MILLIONS!!*

He jiggled it again trying to determine just how much there was left. But the weight of the bottle made it impossible to tell. He unstopped it and peered in. The smell hit him like a physical blow.

BLAM! His head jolted back like he'd been kicked in the head.

"*JESUS CHRIS!!*" He gulped in a great lung full of air. Then coughed it back out explosively. It might make him a fortune but it still smelled like rotten kippers boiled in ammonia.

When he had recovered from his coughing fit he took the bottle and stood under the single 150 Watt bulb that hung from the ceiling. Keeping his nose well away he tilted it this way and that, trying to get the light just so...

There! He could just make it out. His spirits sank. Only about one inch of elixir remained.

He wouldn't make a fortune from an inch! Or would he?

Now he thought about it Tranter hadn't completely immersed the tree in the liquid. Had he? After all he'd been watching closely and he was sure part of the tree had been standing proud of the bowl at the time.

Only one way to find out! He returned to the bench, placing the bottle safely in the centre. Then quickly fetching the bowl placed it next to the bottle. Now all he needed was an object to try it on.

There was a draw above the cupboard in the bench. Mark rummaged in it and found just the thing to try it on. A pencil!

Mark carefully poured a few drops into the bowl. Pleased with himself that he'd worked out why the bowl and bottle were made of gold. The only thing the solution couldn't turn into gold was gold itself! Simple! Though he supposed they'd originally been just ordinary crockery and glass to start with.

He took the pencil and gingerly dropped it into the bowl with just the point dipped in the solution.

Immediately wisps of yellow fumes streamed into the air accompanied by the loud sucking noise he'd heard before. Mark avoiding the fumes peeked into the bowl. The pencil was drawing the liquid up like a straw.

He could see the gold moving up the pencil, like ink soaking its way up a piece of blotting paper.

He was right, somehow the elixir started a chain reaction, moving up the molecular strands and changing them to gold.

He picked up the pencil with the tongs he'd retrieved from the floor, and

dunked it in the water tank as he'd seen Miles Tranter do.

Taking the pencil over to the light, he examined it closely.

Perfect!

He began to titter. It was too much! Years and years of bad luck, and now! His laughter grew. Tears streamed down his face with sheer joy.

All his dreams were on the point of fruition, money, cars and of course Mavis.

Mavis? Come to think of it who the hell needed that two faced cow anymore? With all his money he could afford to buy a dozen Mavis's.

Find 'em. Feel 'em. Fuck 'em, and forget 'em!

The four 'F's. That's what they used to say at school when discussing the local talent, (Though he never got the chance or the luck to follow that advice). He giggled to himself, but all that was about to change. Yes indeedy!

But what to make? He could try Miles Tranter's trick, and pass them off as works of art.

No, that wouldn't work. Too much of a coincidence after Tranters sudden disappearance. What then?

There was nothing for it, he would just have to settle for the face value of the gold in bulk. (*Settle? Hee-hee-hee!*)

He scanned the room. Whatever he chose would have to be big.

Bearing in mind there was probably only enough elixir left for one more process.

He eventually settled on one of the largest tomes, (One he hadn't vandalized). It was at least three feet by two, and a minimum of eight inches thick.

Although bulky. With its individual pages, it would be easy to dispose of a bit at a time. Beside he thought with a grin, I'd really be turning over a new leaf, several of them in fact. Then giggling at his own pun, put the book on the bench next to the rest of his passport to happiness.

Mark poured the remains of the gold making solution into the bowl. Thick and red and looking like the sacrificial blood drained from a white cockerel in some dark voodoo ritual.

He hurriedly brushed off the accumulated dust from the book. Then with a deep sense of occasion, lifted the giant tome and stood one corner of it into the liquid.

Again the process began, the gold spreading up the book. Mark grinned in

delight, it was going to work!

Then suddenly Marks smile faltered. The book now a quarter transformed was becoming very heavy, too heavy in fact for Mark to hold. He struggled to hold it upright, but the now half-changed book tipped towards him. With all of his strength Mark hoisted the book out of the liquid, now down to a few spoonfuls, and took a step back before crumpling under the weight.

As he fell he managed to twist back towards the bench and push the book away from him. The heavy tome crashed to the floor shaking the very foundations. Mark sat up and watched in amazement as the book, although no longer in the liquid still continued to change! In a few more seconds the whole book had completely transformed into gold.

Mark sat there open mouthed. Apparently the amount of liquid used didn't matter! Once the process had started, it was irreversible, unless, presumably it was washed in water.

His feelings of elation at the book of gold, faded as he realized he'd wasted more elixir than he need to.

Then he remembered the few drops left in the bowl when he'd removed the book. And his face once more broke into a huge grin.

"This just gets better and better." he chuckled to himself.

Over in the corner he could see another large volume.

"*Today's sale, Ladies and Gentlemen. Two books for the price of one!*" He giggled excitedly. Then with his eyes firmly locked on his next target, reached up blindly to pull himself up.

And caught the edge of the bowl!

He looked up in alarm as the bowl tipped off the edge and tumbled down towards him. He watched it fall as if in slow motion, the bowl turning over and over, like the caveman's makeshift club in the film 2001. His breath froze in his throat as he saw two red drops tip out of the bowl like falling meteors and splash across his legs, sending plumes of smoke billowing from their craters.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!" He yelled and instinctively tried to wipe it away with his hands. And saw with horror more thin streamers of smoke erupted from between his fingers.

The skin on his palms felt like large scabs, stiff and unyielding. He looked down at his trousers glinting brightly beneath the rising fumes. Beneath them his legs felt oddly stiff, stiffness that seemed to be moving inexorably upwards.

Water! He had to reach the tank of water before it was too late.

Mark reached up, and digging the stiff fingers into the wooden bench top

like grappling hooks, hauled himself to a kneeling position. His solid legs beneath him locked permanently into an ungainly stance.

The tank was at the end of the bench. Just a couple of feet!

With grim determination Mark dragged himself a few inches nearer, but already his elbows were frozen. And lifting the heavy arms a mammoth task.

Beneath him the creeping paralysis had reach his groin. He groaned in despair as he felt his penis stiffen permanently in a drooped position.

Find 'em, feel 'em,?

Mark began to cry.

With one desperate lunge he reached for the tank. And came up three inches short. His heavy arm dropped onto the bench, his flesh and blood shoulder no longer able to carry the weight.

His hips and lower waist turned next, along with his shoulders.

Mark with tears streaming down his face waited for the end.

His ribcage no longer flexed his lungs solidifying, airless.

The rhythmic thump of his heart caught in bid beat.

With a creaking effort he lifted his face to the ceiling, determined to spit in the eye of the vengeful god that awaited him.

The paralysis rushed up his neck, over his jaw. Its weight causing it to drop in a yawning scream and his tongue 'clumped' into its base. Up over his nose, then forming a golden film over his eyes, before culminating in a single point at the crown of his head.

Caught forever in the pose of a yawning penitent man destined to look for eternity at the uncaring heavens. Mark Danvers was now a solid gold man!

But he was still alive! Still aware!

Mark could still feel, hear and even see, though everything seemed covered in a fine golden mist.

But no air passed through those lungs, no blood flowed through the golden arteries or the stilled heart. Yet he was alive!

It seemed impossible but it was true. The process hadn't destroyed the tissue; it had merely changed it in all its complexity. It was like being frozen in a state of suspended animation.

Perfect in every detail, only now totally inanimate. Solid!

Therefore his spirit still existed because he really wasn't dead, and never would be dead until the gold itself corrupted into dust!

The nerve pathways insulated by the microscopic molecules of water that

made up the bulk of a human body, still carried messages. Only now, gold being a better conductor than flesh, much faster and stronger!

Mark wondered how it was he could see, even hazily. Then he remembered hearing how the eye was a ball of water, unchangeable by the elixir, only the thin surface changing to gold. Like the gold coating on astronaut's visors, to protect them from the harsh sun light in orbit, but still allowing a degree of light to enter.

So here he was, every nerve operating at fever pitch and totally unable to move even the smallest of muscles.

He could feel the slight breeze flowing around the cellar like a hair dryer going full blast against his skin. The stench in the room assailed his nose with sickening intensity. He could easily discern between the rotting corpse and his own drying vomit from the morass of pungent chemicals that formed isolated puddles around the floor.

His ears rang with the sound of woodworms chewing their way greedily through drying timbers above him.

His eyes burned with the almost blinding golden light, making the objects before him stand out in astonishing detail.

His present predicament temporally forgotten as he relished his new found senses.

Across the wall before him he watched in awe as a spider climbed slowly up its surface. Even from where he was, some ten feet, he could clearly see its small body rolling from side to side as moved up the wall.

He could see the fine hairs on its legs, and even hear the gentle fall of whitewash as the legs brushed it away seeking purchase.

He had an overwhelming desire to reach out and touch the exquisite creature, to hold it up real close and inspect the infinite complexities of creation.

But his arms and legs wouldn't work.

Now now now! Look but no touching!

Then the reality of the situation came crashing down like Madam Guillotine's cold sharp kiss. He was trapped!! Probably for all eternity, a living mind locked inside a shell of gold.

How long does gold last? He wondered. Then with growing dread, he remembered going to see the Tutankhamen exhibition at the British Museum two years ago. The boy kings' fantastic golden death mask had thrilled him. Lying inside its glass case shining in all its splendour. But now its golden glow only illuminated a torturous journey into the depths of despair. Three thousand years old and not a single blemish!

CHAPTER FOUR

INTO THE DARKNESS

How long had it been? Shut away from the outside world of daylight it was impossible to tell. His only clue coming from his single source of illumination. From time to time, the bulb would flicker as the Power Company switched to other circuits during times of low consumption. Night-time?

He hated the moments when it flickered, convinced every time that it was not the power but the bulb. That this time the flicker would be accompanied by a 'ping' and he would be cast into total darkness. If his heart were capable of beating, at times like that it would have burst in terror. The thought of being alone in the dark with nothing to focus his ever active, never sleeping mind on was to horrifying to contemplate.

Already he was reduced, not only to counting the bricks in the wall, but cataloguing them in their different sizes as well.

The light flickered again. The bulb throwing out a minute amount more light, dazzling to his eyes.

Morning?

Three weeks he estimated. Three whole bloody weeks!

He was aware of something gibbering quietly deep down inside his mind, something that seemed to get louder every day. He pushed his mind away from the insidious thing growing inside him, and concentrated on his surroundings.

Bricks, bricks and more bric....?!

Out of the corner of his eye something moved. Mark locked on to it like a drowning man might clutch at a straw.

It was a large spider, perhaps the size of a fifty pence piece, swinging on its thread. He could see it clearly, the thick milky white fluid oozing out of its round hairy abdomen, stretching, hardening, becoming fine gossamer silk. Its legs spread wide catching the slight air currents, propelling it back and forth in an ever-increasing arc.

Close and closer it swung. He could see and even count the eight eyes that

seemed locked on his own. Then as its swing brought it over his head, he saw a spurt of silk shoot out quickly, dropping the spider like an abseiling marine, on to the top of his head.

Mark felt it instantly, its legs scurrying over his scalp and down over his forehead, where it stopped hesitantly, its front legs raised feeling the air. Then it was off again.

He saw its body close up as it crawled right over his exposed eyeball. Down the side of his nose and over the ridge of his upper lip where it stopped again.

Oh dear God NO!!

After a seemingly age of consideration, the spider suddenly scuttled into his open mouth. It was on his tongue, the sticky feet setting his taste buds alight with the rancid flavour of carrion. It began to explore this new niche with the avid interest of a hunter. Down it went over the back of the tongue triggering that awful gagging sensation like a doctor's spatula.

Mark wanted to heave, wanted to spew out the uninvited intruder, but his shiny gold muscles lay as dormant as ever, leaving the inquisitive visitor and potentially new lodger to search the depths of his body in peace.

Its feet tickled every nerve ending with an intense kaleidoscope of sensation.

The gibbering voice inside him got louder and louder.

Then suddenly it was back in his mouth and crawling onto his bottom lip. It rubbed the bottom of its abdomen on his tongue, depositing a small wad of silk there; it tasted like condensed milk with a heavy helping of salt. Then it was gone, swinging on its thread, once more catching the air currents and finding its way back to the bench.

Mark could still taste its footprints on his tongue, still feel the silk attached there, as it swayed in the air, but at least it was gone. For a time there he though he might go mad with the feel of its hairy body moving around the inside of his mouth and body, but he'd survived and now it was gone.

Then he felt the tugging on the silken line.

The spider was coming back.

Over the next hour Mark watched with a mixture of horror and fascination as the spider joined up the two strands of silk to build its intricate web. He became mesmerized by the sheer skill of the spider as it performed the same task its forbears had been doing for millions of years. His appreciation was short lived however when it became clear where the spider intended to guard his web.

Two months! Mark knew every crack and crevice in the wall before him. His senses were finally dulling though. His eyes were accumulating a thick layer of dust making it difficult to see, it was like looking through the type of smog they had in the fifties, thick and yellow.

His hearing had also dulled, the harsh buzzing of the ever-present bluebottles deforming the fine hairs in his ears, cutting out all but the deep resonant sounds. The dry dust also helped insulate his taste buds against the growing number of dried husks his lodger had acquired. Only the sense of touch was undiminished. He could still feel the heat coming from the spiders body snuggled up close to his gum, still feel the minute hairs tickling the inside of his mouth.

He'd long since lost his revulsion of the spider and had even become grateful for its company. It was after all his only companion, his only escape from the crushing boredom of eternal sleeplessness.

Although over the last few days the spider had seemed sluggish, slower to respond to the tugging on the web on which one hairy leg rested. Indeed more and more flies were escaping as the spider failed to breach the holes rent in its webs fabric.

It was dying. Mark knew it, and envied its impending release from this cruel world.

If only he were that lucky. To leave this...

Clump clump, clump, clump.

Footsteps!

Marks mind spun away from his surroundings. A bright spark of hope shimmered inside his tortured soul.

They must find him, they must!!

But what then? Could they help him? No, that was too much to hope for. No one else in the world even knew how to make the potion to turn things into gold. Never mind being able to reverse the process. Perhaps if he hadn't destroyed all the equipment and most of the books, there might have been a chance. But no he'd put paid to that himself!

Gold he was, and gold he'd stay!

Still if they found him, they'd probably think he was one of Miles Tranters sculptures.

The solid face showed no emotion, but his mind laughed sardonically at the irony of it. He came to steal from Tranters collection, and he ends up not only being part of it, but becoming his last and greatest work of art.

At least they wouldn't leave him here in this God-awful place. They'd take him to the art gallery, probably the big one in London. Clean him up. Get all

the crap out of his mouth and put him on display in a glass case. Similar to the one the rose was kept in. He remembered all the times he'd spent standing in front of that case, how long ago? It seemed like a million years. Well from now on that's all he'd ever do. Stare through the glass, only now he'd do it from the inside!

That wouldn't be so bad. At least there would be things to occupy his mind. A never-ending line of different faces. A million conversations to eavesdrop on.

Company!

Clump, clump, clump, clump.

There it was again! Just above him.

Come on find me. Find ME!!

Now he could hear muffled voices seeping through the ceiling.

Cursing his impaired hearing, he strained every bit of concentration he could muster.

And listened...

"Satisfied Constable?"

P.C. Allen turned back to face his reluctant companion. John Harker, a stocky well weathered farmer, who paid more than a passing resemblance to Frank Tate out of TV's Emmadale.

"Not entirely. Can we go over this one more time? You say Mr. Tranter rented *this!* Place of you?" the policeman said incredulously, his eyes taking in the rotting woodwork and mildew stained plaster of the dilapidated rooms.

"Yes yes yes! Like I told you before. He came up to the farm out of the blue and asked if he could buy the old farmhouse.

'Course I said no. I mean I can't have people owning patches of land right in the middle of my fields! It could lead to all sorts of problems."

He looked inquiringly at P.C. Allen." You know what I mean?"

Without waiting for a response Harker continued.

"So he asks if he can rent the place instead. Well I still said no. I told him the place was condemned, that's why we abandoned it ourselves. "

"But he was most insistent, saying he didn't mind it being run down and that it was just what he needed."

Turning away, P.C. Allen roamed around the room. Stopped, drew a finger across the dust lain table, then studied the sooty deposit in his fingers like a mystic studying the entrails of some sacrificial goat.

Without averting his gaze he said over his shoulder, "So what changed

your mind?"

Harker shrugged, "Money! What else!?"

"And how long has he been renting it from you?"

"Two... nearly three year, I guess."

"Look constable is this going to take much longer. We've been though all this already! And I got things to do. There's the milking and the north field needs..."

"All in good time Mr Harker." P.C. Allen turned to face Harker, crossed his arms and rested his ample bottom on the table, causing it to slide back a couple of inches with a teeth jarring screech.

"And you've no idea where Mr. Tranter may have gone?"

Harker thrust his large hands deep into his pockets and seemed to shrink a little as he sighed in exasperation.

"No I 'aven't. Why don't you try his other addresses? Perhaps they know?"

"We already have. No ones seen him. Last they heard he was coming down here. Supposedly to do some work." he looked around him, "Though I've seen precious little evidence that he did *anything* here!"

"Tell me," he continued, "Did he seem worried or unhappy last time you saw him?"

Harker burst out laughing, "Unhappy?! That's an understatement. He was hopping mad more like!"

The constable rose attentively, "He was angry with someone? Do you know who?"

Oh I! I know who. Bloody British Telecom, that's who!"

"Paid a fortune he did to have the phone put in way out here. And the silly bastards forgot to make it ex-directory. Boy was he pissed!"

P.C. Allen's face dropped in disappointment, "And that's all. Just the phone people?"

"Ah that's it!"

The policeman puffed out his cheeks and blew noisily. "Well all that remains is to double check the premises to make sure he's not lying injured somewhere."

"If you insist. But I tell yer he 'ain't here!"

As the two of them moved around the house, down in the cellar Mark listened and waited. They had to find him, they had to!!

"Help me. I'm down here in the cellar!"

The sounds of footsteps were getting nearer. They were in the kitchen now...

"Satisfied constable?"

"Is this all the rooms? I thought these old houses all had cellars?"

"YES YES YESSSSSS!!!"

"There used to be." replied Harker, "but it was bricked up years ago. Rats you know? Haven for the little bastards it was!"

"I remember me old dad doing it when I weren't nowt but a nipper. The door used to be in here somewhere? Gone now of course."

"No! No he opened it up again. Tranter opened it up! That's why he wanted it in the first place!"

Harker smiled "That's one thing I can assure you of constable. He 'ain't in the cellar!!"

"No please I'm here! I'm HERE!!!"

P.C. Allen stroked his chin, "Yes well, he certainly isn't here. I'll report back to the Sarge' and tell him they'll have to look elsewhere"

Both men turned to leave. Then at the door the policeman hesitated and looked back into the kitchen.

"What will you do with house if he doesn't come back?"

"I'll give him a few more weeks and if I don't hear nothing...Bulldoze it most like. Before it falls over and hurts someone."

"Bulldoze it? Won't that leave a bit of a mess?"

"No. Most of it will collapse into the old cellar. Then a bit of top soil on the top and you'd never know it was ever here!"

"Noooooooooooooooooooooooooo..."

"What about the furniture?"

"T'aint worth the trouble of taking it out. It can go down with the house."

P.C. Allen walked back into the kitchen and stood in front of the welsh Dresser. "Even this?"

Harker raised one eyebrow and smirked, "Why? Interested?"

"Hmmm, I might," the constable said running his hand over its surface. "Sarah's always wanted one of these in our kitchen. And if it's going spare..."

"Yes yes have it. Pull it away from the wall. It's easy! Third cup hook on the left. Try it TRY IT!!!"

"Oh it's spare all right..." Harker began to chuckle, "that's if you like a lot

of company?"

The P.C. looked at him puzzled, "Company?"

The farmer walked over to the dresser reached up to the shelf with the cup hooks screwed in and gripping its edge, broke off a piece of wood and crumbled it between his fingers like breadcrumbs. He held the musty smelling sawdust out for the policeman to see, "Company!"

"SHIT! Wood worm!"

"Still want it constable?" Harker said smiling sarcastically.

P.C.Allen gave Harker a withering look, "Haven't you got some milking to do?" he said. Then brushed past him and left.

The farmer sniggered, rubbed his dirty fingers on his jeans and turned to leave.

In the cellar the golden man knelt impassive. No emotion showed on the solid face. No sound came from its open mouth, but inside Mark was crying.

Totally crushed at the prospect of being buried alive, amid the dark cloying earth with its inquisitive worms.

And for how long could he endure?

Three thousand years and not a single blemish....

'It' was coming! He could feel it. The insane babbling deep inside him was rising nearer and nearer. His hold on sanity was slipping like sand through his fingers.

He had to hold on he had to!

But the prospect of eternity trapped in a perpetual silent darkness brought unrelenting terror hammering at his mind.

Louder and louder 'IT' giggled. Closer and closer!

I must not give in! I MUST NOT!!

Desperately he did the only thing he could to stop 'IT' taking him over. He pushed his mind away, forcing it to concentrate on the simplest of tasks.

He began counting the bricks in the wall for the umpteenth time.

One, two, threeeee,(push) four, five, ssssix,(push) sev.....

And then the light went out!

"There" said Harker with a satisfied grin as he closed up the junction box on the outside of the house, turning the key with a satisfied click.

"No point in wasting electricity, for no good reason...."

Deep in the dark cellar Marks mind finally crashed

IT'S! Heeeeeeeere!!

Never the breaks. Never the luck....

THE END.

THE WAY BACK

**“Be careful what you wish for.
It might just come true!”**

Unknown

Eric hurried up the street clutching the small brown parcel lovingly to his chest,

"Tonight!" he thought with a wide grin, "tonight's the night," then chuckling heartily to himself almost broke into a run in his haste to be home.

In the garden his son Leslie was sitting on the ground with his spider trap, (a jam jar with its base broken off). A small weedy blonde haired boy, with thick glasses, he was the image of his Father.

In the jar he'd caught a large Daddy-long-legs spider and as Eric approached, he unscrewed the lid, reached in and picked it up.

"Hello Mr Spider... Do you love me?" he asked grinning evilly, as he slowly and methodically, began pulling its legs off one by one, "Love me... Love me not... Love me... love me not."

"Leslie!" Eric shouted in horror, "don't be so damn cruel!" he made a grab for the spider, but Leslie hugged it to his chest protectively.

"No it's mine!" he pouted.

"Leslie, put the poor thing out of its misery this instant!"

"Shan't!"

He raised his hand to smack, "I said put..."

"Mommmmmm!" Leslie wailed, "Dad's picking on me, Mommmmmm."

Eric froze; the last thing he wanted was a confrontation with Mandy, not now, not tonight.

"Oh please yourself!" he said turning away, trying not to notice the look of triumph on the six year olds face. As he reached the door he heard Leslie's cold laughter and turned to see him holding the spider in the palm of his hand. It was down to one leg now, and hobbling in circles vainly trying to escape. He had an overwhelming urge to run back and stamp on it.

"Love me not!!" said Leslie as its last leg came off. Then no longer interested, flicked its still living body away to lie defenceless amid a host of other prowling insects in the undergrowth.

Eric shivered and wondered, not for the first time, where he'd gone so badly wrong with the boy. He gripped the parcel tighter and smiled, "never mind, next time, next time it'll be different."

As he entered the house. The smell hit him instantly, a heavy pungent odour of congealed grease and dog hair. In the front room Mandy lay sprawled on the sofa like a beached whale, only twice as big and half as pretty. On her stomach rested a half eaten box of chocolates, across her legs, it's coat matted with dried food, lay a bedraggled poodle. In the corner the television flickered the latest Australian soap.

"Is there any tea?" he enquired without much hope.

"We've already had ours, haven't we Poochie?" she said flicking the dog a chocolate, who lifted his head idly and snapped it out of the air like a fly. "You'll find a tin or something in the cupboard if your hungry." she added, waving her hand vaguely in the direction of the kitchen.

Eric opened the kitchen door, took one look at the sink piled high with dirty crocks and the cooker thick with grease and quickly closed it again, "I'll have something later" he said thickly. "I think I'll go down to the shed now for a while."

"Ok. You can do us all some supper later," she mumbled as another chocolate disappeared into her mouth.

Inside the shed Eric slid the door bolt in place, and sighed. This was *His* place! No one else's. On the far wall a beautiful naked woman leered down at him from an out of date calendar. To the right, a long bookcase crammed with books on witchcraft and the occult. Whilst beneath the painted out window was a table laden with jars of various coloured powders and liquids.

Eric, his fingers shaking nervously, unwrapped the parcel to reveal a crystal ball. Suspended in the solid glass, where millions of minute black specks. He held it up to the light in admiration.

"A genuine Sphere of Solomon." he whispered reverently. It had taken years to find, and cost him every penny he owned including a hefty loan against the house. But if it did what his books said it did. It was cheap at the price. He took an ancient leather bound book out of the bookcase and opened it at a well-read page.

Sphere of Solomon; An occult artefact, used by adepts in the black arts to reincarnate the spirit into a new life. The ritual for reincarnation involves....

"A new life!" Eric thought happily, "a chance to start again, to retain ones memory and experiences, but in a new body."

The thought thrilled him, what he could do. What he *would* do! Armed with a lifetime of experience, he could rule the world! With an excited giggle he began the ritual.

Eric wiped the sweat from his brow, after two solid hours of chanting and drawing mystic shapes with the coloured powders. He was ready for the last three, and most dangerous stages.

Eric, the ball held tightly in both hands, tiptoed into the front room, stood behind the sofa and lifted the ball high.

"What the...?" Mandy's scream was cut short as the heavy ball crashed down onto her left temple. The poodle leapt to the floor with a yelped of alarm, and stood facing Eric, a low warning growl escaping from its throat.

Eric ignored it and held the ball up close.

Nothing!

Fear welled in his stomach, "Oh no! It's not working! It can't be a genuine... Wait! What's that?"

Inside the glass, one by one, the small black flecks started to change colour, first mauve, then deep red, getting brighter all the time. Finally it shone like a small star, bathing the whole room with an unearthly brilliant red glow.

Eric threw back his head and laughed hysterically, "*True, True,*" he cried, "It's all *true!*" Poochie crept into a corner, his ears flat against his head, and whined softly.

Now for the second stage. The ball had absorbed the life energy, now he had to direct it. The thought of pain turned his legs to jelly. But there was no turning back now.

He took the ceremonial dagger from his pocket, and cut a small nick in the pad of his thumb. As the blood welled up, he smeared it across the ball in the letters of his name written backwards. He held the ball aloft again and chanted.

"Lord of Darkness, I give thee payment." Then hurled the crystal down on to the floor where it shattered into a million pieces of iridescent colour. Like fireflies the pieces flew up, swirling around his body in a frenzied whirlwind. Eric stood mesmerised as they circled him. As they passed close to his eyes he just make out their tiny forms, Minute gargoyle like figures that darted this way and that. Then suddenly with a soft 'slurp' they disappeared into his body. Eric gasped in shock as his whole body writhed and tingled. It felt like there were a million ants burrowing beneath the surface of his skin. .

He was ready now for the final and most dangerous stage of all. Before he could have a new life, he must first give up his present one.

He'd debated the best way of doing it, anything involving pain was *Out!* So he'd decided on a drug overdose. He reached into his other pocket and took out a bottle of Mandy's sleeping tablets. He looked down at them in his

hand, his ticket to a new life. But first he had to make sure he wasn't found too soon.

He slid the bolts on all the doors, outside he could see Leslie still hunting spiders. No need to worry about him then! He sat down and counted out the tablets. Too few, and he would wake up back in his old life, with all the consequences of what he'd done. Too many, and it would just make him vomit it all back up with the same consequences. Eleven, that's what all the books said about being a fatal dose. One after another he popped in a pill and washed it down with a slug of whisky.

He leaned back into the chair. The crawling beneath his skin had sunk deeper into his body leaving him with a soft buzzing sensation deep inside.

He closed his eyes and smiling, allowed himself to drift into unconsciousness.

Blackness!

His eyes fluttered open, it was like looking through a child's kaleidoscope, images were blurred and disorientated, "damn drugs are still affecting me," he thought. He tried again and although his eyes still weren't working properly he could tell he was no longer in the chair, in fact he wasn't even indoors.

"*I made it!!*" Elation coursed through his body, "I've come *Back!*" He shook his head to try and clear his vision. It didn't help, "It'll wear off," he consoled himself. "Now where am I...?"

The first twinge of apprehension crept up his back as he realised, he was on the edge of a forest, and not just any forest but one unlike any he'd ever seen before.

As far as his defective eyes could see, strange tightly packed vegetation soared unnaturally high into the air. Huge boulders lay scattered on the gravel like earth about him. A flick of movement drew his attention to one of the boulders a short distance away. Eric's mind recoiled in horror as something big and black crawled into view. Some monstrous creature as big as a small horse, with large jaws and long antennae that even now was turning towards him.

Eric turned to run then stopped in astonishment. Just above him, high in the sky hovered a huge flying saucer.

"*Tricked!*" he thought in horror, "The Devil cheated, he brought me back, but to an *Alien* world!"

The large metallic disc started to descend, and Eric ran. He ran faster, more effortlessly than he'd ever ran before, "there's lighter gravity here," he thought hopefully, "now if only my damned vision would clear. I might escape to the forest yet."

Then suddenly he ran into an invisible wall. He looked up and could just make out the sunlight shimmer where the force field radiated from the edge of the saucer.

He cowered at its edge looking fearfully up at the silver disc. And as he did, so it began to rotate, slowly at first, but rapidly gaining momentum, till suddenly flying off at high speed.

In its place was a face, a face framed with blonde hair and wearing thick glasses.

Cold dark terror filled his body as the grinning face receded and was replaced by a huge hand that reached down through the hole in the sky, reaching nearer and nearer.

Eric screamed, inside a head with no vocal chords and eight separate eyes, he screamed in mortal fear. As the all too familiar voice reverberated through the jam-jar.

"Hello Mr Spider..... Do You Love Me?"

THE END.

THE QUIET HOUR

**“Death has no dominion.
On the evil that walks the night”**

Anon

No.1. MALE: JONATHAN DILKS. 43 YEARS... *Skip it!*

flip.

No 2. MALE: DEREK HALIS...

flip.

No. 3. FEMALE:... *Ahhh!* GLADYS BROWN. 71 YEARS. *Shit! Skip it!*

Herbert Doyle with increasing impatience flipped to the next page.

No. 4. FEMALE: DEBORAH WILKS. 16, YEARS. *YES!!*

Cause of death: INTERNAL INJURIES: SEVERE PELVIC AND
ABDOMINAL TRAUMA. *shit! shit!! SHIT!!!*

flip.

Herbert sat on the autopsy table, his short legs swinging back and forth over the damp disinfected floor beneath. His eyes locked on the admission register resting on his lap.

No. 5. MALE:....

flip.

No. 6. MALE:....

flip.

No. 7. FEMALE: SANDRA WALTON. 22 YEARS....

With bated breath Herbert ran his finger down the 'Cause of death'.

.... SEVERE HEAD INJURIES. *Yesssssssss!!*

Time of death: 2: 25. 6 JULY. 1993.

Examination: COMPLETE. 10:15. 6th JULY 1993.

Discharge: DUE 14: 00. 7th JULY 1993.

He glanced quickly up at the electric clock on the tiled wall and giggled excitedly. 3.A.M exactly! Perfect!

The quiet hour.

Jumping down from the table he moved quickly to draw seven. His heart fluttered in his chest as he reached out and took hold of the handle. Then with one last furtive look over his shoulder, drew in a deep expectant breath and opened the draw.

The well-oiled rollers echoed like distant thunder around the deserted morgue as the draw rolled out a full six feet.

Inside a prone figure lay beneath a white sheet. Herbert walked around the side and taking hold of its top edge, pulled the sheet halfway down.

Herbert let out his breath, she was, or had been very pretty. That was before the lamppost had cracked her skull open of course. One eyebrow was crushed inwards pushing a now opaque eye out onto her cheek where, tethered by a dried strand of optic nerve it rested like a child's marble. The nose also, having been so violently shoved to one side, had ripped the surrounding tissue of her face, causing most of her top lip to hang down in a large flap of skin, exposing blood stained peppermint scented teeth.

He shook his head, would they never learn? Riding pillion on some studs motorbike without bothering with a crash helmet no doubt. Now her good youthful looks, along with her life were gone.

Not a pretty sight! But then it wasn't her face he was interested in, was it?

Herbert licked his lips as his gaze travelled down to her chest. Twin slightly flattened mounds topped with erect nipples tinged a delicate shade of blue lay before him. Completely undamaged apart from a livid blue-green bruise covering the entire left shoulder.

Better than he could have hoped for!

Tentatively he reached out one trembling hand and rested it on her good shoulder. His breath was coming quicker now as he slowly, slowly slid his hand down over the milky white flesh. Cold as ice but softening the flesh beneath his fingers gave as he gently kneaded the dead tissue. But although soft all its elasticity had gone, the breast retaining the shape it was squeezed into like modelling clay.

Herbert smoothed out the indentations his fingers had made, with the flat of his hands, before moving on to lift one of the girls arms. With one hand round the wrist the other gripping the upper arm, Herbert worked the arm back and forth at the elbow, testing the suppleness of it. It was still a little stiff, creaking slightly at the joint, but Herbert, satisfied that the rigor mortis was almost completely gone, replaced the arm by her side, stepped back and smiled.

She was ready!

Using the stretcher trolley Herbert transferred the body to the autopsy table and removed the sheet. His eyes were drawn to the triangle of curly

brown hair below her navel. He glanced quickly at the straw coloured hair of her head matted thickly with dried blood.

"Not a true blonde after all are we Missy?" he giggled.

Moving around to her feet he went through the well-used routine he'd learnt from many such encounters.

The stainless steel table resembled a pool table. Only instead of six pockets, there were six drains joined together by a deep gutter that ran all around the outer edge. The whole table could be jacked up or down to various different heights for the convenience of the Pathologist.

Herbert used this to take it down to the bottom of its travel. Then lifting the girls knees in turn, jammed her heels into the bottom two drains, spreading the knees wide in the process.

Next he took a tub of Vaseline out of his pocket and placed it on the table. He looked back up at the clock. 3: 20.

Good! The next shift wasn't due on till 8.A.M. He was alone for the night. Unless....?

Unless there was a late admission! Unlikely of course. Ten years he'd worked this shift and in all that time he'd only ever had one admission between the hour of 3 and 4.A.M.

For some unknown reason corpses just weren't admitted very often at this time. Before 3 A M all hell was let loose, what with all the drunken driving accidents. But after that there were just the 'natural causes', heart attacks, old people passing away in their sleep, that sort of thing. Again for some reason 3 A M was the most common time for it to happen. So by the time they'd been found, rushed to the Hospital and worked on, it was never earlier than 4 A M before he got them.

So he it was again. The quiet hour.

Still it wouldn't hurt to check!

Herbert left the room, walked down the corridor and opened the outer door. All was quiet. No ambulances waited outside the entrance. He could just make out a nurse through the window of casualty across the courtyard, sitting on a bed in one of the cubicles drinking from a white plastic cup.

No rush in there either!

Satisfied all was safe he returned to the morgue.

As he walked through the doors and saw the dead girl lying on the table, her legs spread wide, the raw pink lips of her vagina crudely exposed in the harsh neon light.

A momentary feeling of guilt washed over him. He bit his lip and turned

away, catching his own reflection in the doors double window.

A balding thirty two-year-old tub of lard stared back with small piggy eyes. Eyes made to look even smaller by comparison with his huge bulbous nose.

He lifted one hand to the large 'red wine' birthmark that covered almost the entire right hand side of his face and neck. It didn't hurt! Wasn't infectious!

Yet people treated him like a leper! Either openly gawping at him like he was creature from the Black Lagoon, or worse, looking anywhere other than at him when they *had* to speak to him (rarely).

His mother had chided him as a child, when he'd told her of his fear of rejection because of the stain.

"Nonsense! What does it matter? It's only skin deep. It's what's inside that's important! Everyone knows that!"

She was wrong!

It did matter.

He remembered at thirteen, in the first flush of puberty, how he'd spent weeks building up his courage to ask a girl out.

Joanie Cook. An unattractive, bespectacled, ginger haired girl whose own face, was smothered in thick orange freckles. Someone he thought would understand, sympathize. A kindred spirit!

So summoning all his courage, he'd walked up to her in the playground whilst she was playing with friends and asked if she would like to go to the pictures with him on Saturday.

She'd gaped at him, with those enormously magnified eyes behind thick bottle bottom lenses.

Then suddenly, clamping a hand over her mouth burst into a fit of giggles. Her friends joined in the laughter, teasing her with mock encouragement to go out with him, and calling everyone around to come and see Joanies new boy friend.

Herbert had stood there transfixed, like a rabbit caught in the headlights of a huge juggernaut, hardly daring to breathe. His face getting hotter and hotter, whilst his insides got colder and colder.

"W-well..... How about it? w-wanna' come?"

Joanie had looked at him as if he were mad, and then with an eye for a rare chance to impress her friends, had stuck he nose in the air and christened him with the name that would follow him through his entire schooldays.

"I wouldn't go out with YOU!! Herbie....HERBIE HORROR!! If you were the last boy on earth" Then with sudden inspiration smirked as she added.

"Why don't you find yourself an Indian squaw? After all that's what redskins are supposed to do isn't it?"

Herbert's spirit crumbled as everyone around him roared with laughter and began jogging on the spot, hooping and hollering like red Indians.

And so he'd run from the playground with the sound of their laughter ringing in his ears and hid himself in the cycle shed.

Holding his head in his hands he cried till he could cry no more. Then came out determined never to give anyone the chance to treat him like that again. Ever!!

That was the first and last time he ever asked anyone out. His only experience with women's bodies confined to pornographic magazines and seedy strip clubs. Only ever allowed to look. Never to touch!

Then he'd got this job as an orderly. He'd watched the admissions come and go. Was given the chance to come very close and even touch, (when no one was looking,) some of the female bodies private places.

Soon just touching wasn't enough! The availability of all that defenceless, female flesh was more than he could stand.

So when the hospital had decided to man the morgue 24 hours a day. He'd volunteered for the night shifts (A shift no one else wanted.) On the pretext that he needed his days free to attend a college course.

That was ten years ago. No one ever bothered to ask him how his college course was going or why it was taking so long. As long as he was there to do the most unpopular shift in the hospital, no one really cared!

He looked down at his feet and sighed miserably. It didn't have to be like this. If only he could find someone who could see past his ugly exterior!

But no! Girls were so shallow. Only interested in young studs on their bloody big motorbikes. He'd seen them, staring at him, giggling behind their hands.

"Oooo look! It's Herbie Horror the Redskin!"

He turned back to the table, his top lip curling back in derision as he viewed the body. His eyes blazed with ice cold revenge, evaporating any semblance of guilt that remained.

Herbert strode over to the table snatched up the Vaseline, opened it and thrusting two fingers into it gouged out a large lump. Then brandishing it before him, stepped between the legs of the late Sandra Walton.

"Stupid, useless girls!!" he hissed as he roughly smeared the white grease into the yawning vagina, ramming it in deep.

With heart pounding, he hastily dropped his trousers and underpants and

scrambled on to the table. Kneeling between the girls legs, he again took the Vaseline, but this time smeared it gently over his own extended penis. Breathing shallowly, every nerve ending in his body tingling with anticipation, he began!

Starting at her breasts he again began kneading the chilled flesh, gently at first but as his excitement rose so his ministrations became more and more savage. Squeezing and squeezing, harder, harder. He took her erect nipples between his fingers and twisted the small buds cruelly. It never failed to amaze him how the nipples were always erect, as if dying was somehow a very erotic experience.

He was panting now. His penis was throbbing painfully. Hot and hard it felt like there was a steel band clamped about it, squeezing, squeezing.

Herbert looked down at the inviting hole before him, cold and slick, just waiting for him. He lowered the end of his shaft till it was just touching the opening. A thrill shot through him at the feel of the soft cold flesh on his aching member. He pulled back quickly, sucking in his breath forcing the rising sperm back from premature release and spoiling the pleasure.

When he had control once more he again placed the tip of his penis in the silky entrance. And then with a deep satisfying sigh, pushed it home.

The cold, greasy dead flesh held him. The internal organs still slightly more in rigor than the outside, offered a tight fit. Herbert began to slowly push in and out, a low moaning passing his lips as he moved quicker and quicker.

Several time he had to stop and grip the base of his shaft to prolong the moment to climax. Finally he could wait no longer and drove on relentlessly, harder and harder.

The dislodged eye swung back and forth across her cheek, with every thrust, leaving a sticky snail like trail.

Unmindful of this Herbert's thrust became quicker and quicker his face alight with the feeling growing steadily in the base of his shaft.

'IT' was coming! Closer closer. Harder push harder!

Yes, yes 'IT' was coming. Oh dear God Yes! Harder, faster FASTER!!

One of the girl's legs, shaken free of the drain by Herbert's frenzy, dropped suddenly wrenching the body to one side.

Herbert's penis slipped from the dead shroud that surrounded it, and lay on the mat of pubic hair above it like a fish out of water.

Herbert desperately tried to re-insert it quickly, fumbling with both hands, only to have it slip out repeatedly as the unresponsive corpse's leg swung back and forth.

Herbert quickly scooped up the leg onto his shoulder and rammed his cock home again, hard! And quickly resumed his thrusting. But the moment had passed and now his exertions had less and less effect. A combination of the loosening internal organs and the numbing cold of the chilled body taking more and more sensation away all the time.

Desperately Herbert punched his fist into the pubic area of her stomach trying to create some friction on his flagging shaft. And felt something tear inside as the dead tissue now so fragile, ruptured. All the elasticity leaving the area as the walls of the uterus shredded.

All mushy in there now!

Screaming with frustration, Herbert withdrew and climbed off the table. He cupped both hands around his freezing penis trying desperately to get some warmth back into it.

After some minutes of gentle stroking it was once again ready for action.

He examined the dead girls' vagina hopefully. A yellow, watery discharge trickled slowly from the opening.

DAMN!! The internal lining of the uterus *was* badly ruptured. It would take a prick the size of a elephant to get any sensation from it now.

Well not to worry. He'd come across this problem before and knew the answer.

He pulled the body to one side of the table then rolled it over on to its front.

He heard something soft, splat onto the floor on the other side of the table. Walking around he found that the loose eye had broken free and dropped on the floor like a small overripe tomato.

SHIT!! Never mind he'd sort that out later. First things first. Taking hold of each leg he dragged the body down the table till the hips were in line with the edge. Placing the feet on the floor, Herbert moved to the jacking point and levered the table up until it was waist high.

Standing behind it, he kicked the legs apart again then parting the cheeks with one hand reached for the Vaseline with the other.

He was just about to apply the lubricant when the sound of a vehicle pulling up outside disturbed him.

A big wad of cold stew churned in the pit of his stomach.

A new admission? No it couldn't be. MUSTN'T be!!

Hurrying down the corridor he peered cautiously out into the dark. At the top of the ramp leading to the road, was an ambulance, the driver and paramedic already in the process of removing something from inside.

The absence of a blue flashing light didn't bode well. It meant whatever they were carrying was no longer urgent. And at this time of the morning that could only mean one thing.

An admission for the morgue!

His whole world felt like it was crumbling. If they discovered what he was doing.....

Herbert dashed back into the morgue, grabbed hold of the trolley and wheeled it over to the table. Outside he heard the ambulance door slam shut.

Oh my God they're coming!

Grabbing the dead girl around the waist he tried to heave her onto the trolley. The girl slipped and sagged like a puppet with its strings cut as if deliberately trying to delay him as much as possible.

Footsteps coming down the ramp!

In desperation, all his training deserted him as he tried to manhandle her back on the trolley. But the more he tried to push her on, the more it rolled away from him.

He was sweating now, a cold hard sweat.

The far corridor door banged open.

Oh sweet Jesus!!

Abandoning the trolley he dragged the body over to the draw its heels squealing noisily on the stone tiled floor.

He could hear them talking as they came closer, closer!.

With the strength born from sheer panic he heaved the body into the draw. He looked over his shoulder and could see the shadow of the men approaching through the clear Perspex window in the door.

He slid the draw in, only to find it stick fast, six inches from the end. He shoved and shoved but it wouldn't budge. He was almost crying now. He heard a bump and turned to see the first ambulance man backing in, carrying one end of a stretcher that reached out into the corridor. He turned back to the draw determined to give it one more push, and saw the problem! The girls' right foot was sticking out, blocking the way.

Hurriedly shoving the foot in, he slammed the draw shut, and turned quickly to lean against it, just as the second man entered the room carrying his half of the stretcher.

Herbert stared dry mouthed fearing he'd been seen, his heart beating so loud they must surely hear it!

"Watch yer Herbie. Got a new one for yer!"

Herbert hated to be called 'Herbie' and would normally have tore a strip of the person doing it, but now as he looked into the smiling face of Marty the young ambulance driver. He felt far too relieved to castigate the youngster.

A recent recruit, tall and gangly with bright ginger hair that matched his eyebrows and eyelashes! The explosion of freckles on his face reminded him of Joanie.

Herbert had heard of albinos, people with no colour pigment in their bodies. And wondered if Marty and Joanie weren't some kind of red albino? Born with only the red pigment present.

He smiled to himself as he wondered if he was like the girl, and truly the same hair colour all over?

Herbert, trying to act as naturally as possible, sauntered up to the stretcher and pulled back the red blanket covering the body.

A woman, black and very beautiful.

"She been cleared in 'crash' Frank?" Herbert asked turning to the paramedic, hoping he wouldn't detect the tremble in his voice.

Frank shrugged "No need! Murder victim. Certified at scene by police doctor." he answered laconically, his dull brown eyes showing no sign of interest.

An exact opposite to Marty, Frank was fifty-ish, bald as a coot, and permanently pissed off!

"You shouldn't have brought her here. You know the procedures as well as I do. All inmates have to be cleared by the duty Registrar!" Herbert said indignantly.

Frank gave a long-suffering sigh, "I told you she's been cleared by the police doctor."

"Not good enough!" Herbert screeched. He knew he was over reacting but nearly getting caught had spooked him.

"A quick examination by some half asleep G.P called out from his bed in the middle of the night, just isn't good enough! What if she's not really dead? Who gets the blame if she wakes up in a draw screaming her head off, Hmmm?"

"She's dead alright, don't worry about that!" Frank said matter of factly.

"Oh! So now you're a qualified doctor are you?" Herbert said smirking.

Franks eyes flared at the orderly. Then speaking through clenched teeth, threw the blanket all the way back.

"You don't need to be a doctor to know that if a woman's got a four foot crucifix jammed up her twat, she's dead! O.K?!!"

Herbert stared open mouthed at the body on the stretcher.

A tall slender naked woman with cinnamon coloured skin lay before him, heavy breasted with large almost black nipples as thick as his little finger standing proud. No pubic hair, the skin shaved to a smooth silken mound.

The body was unmarked, the only sign of blood was around the cleft of her legs from which protruded the top half of a large wooden crucifix, the type often seen hanging on the walls of churches.

The cross was made from 5"x 2" solid oak. Its tip reached down to her knees, with the traversing bar resting across her hips. The longer bottom half disappeared inside the woman's body making the figure nailed on the cross look like an emerging child.

Crazily the image of the old T.V series Mork and Mindy, popped into his mind. What was it Mork used to say? People on the planet Ork, were born middle aged and then got younger! Just like this sad bearded man, caught forever with his arms spread wide in an elegant swan dive to being born.

Herbert swallowed hard, "H-how long is that thing?"

Now it was Franks turn to smirk, "Let's just say, if it was four or five inches longer, she be spitting splinters."

"Christ!!!"

"Exactly Herbie old bean." Frank laughed raising his eyebrows at the unintentional pun, "Got it in one!"

Marty winced, "Hey Frank this isn't funny. The girls dead."

"So?!!" Frank challenged, his smile falling from his face.

Marty squirmed uncomfortably, "So..so it's...You know? Disrespectful."

"Disrespectful?!" Frank laughed. "She's dead kid! And after what we heard up on the Chase. You! Expect me to be respectful?"

Marty, intimidated, averted his gaze and stood silent.

Frank satisfied he'd put the kid in his place turned to Herbert. "So where do you want her?"

Herbert tore his eyes away from the body on the stretcher, "I-I..er..I don't know that I should. I mean she's unregistered and.."

"No what she *IS*," Frank growled menacingly. "... is bleedin' heavy, that's what she is. Now where the *fuck*! Do you want her?!!"

Herbert looked into the glaring face of 'The Bear' A nickname given to him by the other drivers (behind his back of course). A work-shy, bully who was as cantankerous as a bear with a sore head and everyone's last choice of a partner! Herbert glanced across at browbeaten Marty who had obviously

drawn the short straw tonight, (Poor sod!) before looking back at the strikingly beautiful face of the dead girl.

"O.K put her on the table I'll sort her out in a bit".

Frank smirked triumphantly, "bout time too. Over here kid, before this bitch pulls my arms out of their sockets."

The two men placed the stretcher on the table. Frank rolled the body towards him while Marty pulled the stretcher from beneath. The body rolled back on to its back. The wooden cross giving the table a sharp rap as it did.

"Right that's it! I'm off to the canteen for a cup of tea and a fag." Frank declared marching towards the door, "See to the stretcher kid. Back in half an hour."

Marty coughed nervously, "Er.. Frank we should go back to the cab. There may be another call?"

"Stuff the calls!" Frank shouted over his shoulder.

"But Frank..."

Frank stopped, and stood looking down at his shoes for several seconds. Herbert could almost hear him counting to ten. Finally giving a loud exasperated sigh, he turned and walked right up to Marty. Thrust his face right up close to his and pinning him with his steely glare hissed through clenched teeth.

"Look here Mr. Florence-bloody-Nightingale! If you want to go and sit in the cab. Fine! But if there is another call? Well we're too busy here. Right?! So they'll have to get some other daft sods to do it instead. Right?! Is that quite clear?"

Marty for the second time that night averted his eyes and nodded agreement.

"Good. I'll see you in half.... No make that three quarters of an hour." then with a final bullying sneer 'The Bear' left.

"Bastard!" Marty whispered. Then turning to Herbert said, "I'd like to shove a cross up his arse!"

Herbert smiled, "Only one? There's room for several up there. In fact I'd say he was the biggest arse hole around!"

The two men laughed, but as they looked back down at the body on the table their smiles withered.

"Jesus Christ who could do a thing like that. I hope they catch the bastard." said Herbert his one hand sliding over the rough wooden cross.

"Oh they've already got him!" said Marty "The police were holding him when we got there."

"Total loony of course. We could hear him screaming that she'd made him do it. That it was part of some satanic ritual."

"She *MADE*! Him do it?!" Herbert repeated incredulously.

"True as I'm standing here Herb!"

"Herbert!"

"What?.. Oh yeah, Herbert. Sorry! Anyway as I was saying we could hear him going on. Something about her being a witch and wanting to marry 'The Prince of Darkness'!"

Suddenly Herbert spotted something that made his stomach turn over. Not eighteen inches from Marty's foot, lay Sandra Walton's lost eye! If Marty were to look down.....

Pretending he was trying to take a better look at her face, Herbert came around and stood beside Marty.

"You think that's possible?" Said Herbert looking into the girl's beautiful face, "That she was a witch?"

"I don't know Herbi...Herbert. But something funny sure had been going on. When we got there that cross she's impaled on. Well the top half of it was wedged into an old tree stump. And her legs were dangling either side of it. She could easily have supported her weight by putting her feet on the stump, but she didn't. Why?" He shrugged, "Beats me. And what's more there were weird signs cut into the sides of the tree stump. Similar to them hieroglyphics you see in pyramids."

"What about the man?" Herbert asked.

Marty snorted, "He was out of it. I mean *WAY* out of it! You know he tried to say that she'd done it herself! That she'd climbed up on the tree stump straddled the cross and jumped!

And that when she got stuck, she made him take hold of her legs. Can you believe this? Take hold of her legs and pull down."

As Marty shook his head in horror, Herbert seized the opportunity of his distraction, to put his foot on the eye. Even through the sole of his shoe he could feel the jellying orb squelch beneath his foot. A problem he'd have to sort out later, but at least it solved the immediate crisis!

Relieved Herbert felt free to study the body before him. The vaginal lips and surrounding skin were missing, having been drawn into the woman's body as the cross entered.

Herbert shivered at the thought of what it must have felt like, being dragged down, slowly, over the coarse wooden cross.

"We were talking to one of the coppers first on the scene" said Marty,

"And you know where that mad bastard was when they found him?"

Herbert slowly shook his head. Not really wanting to know what the young ambulance driver was going to say next, but the darker side of him unable to keep from listening.

"On her back! Humping up and down for all he was worth. Driving the cross deeper and deeper. Even when the cross piece prevented it going any further, still he pumped. He was still doing it when they dragged him off screaming."

"God knows what she'd have looked like if the fires hadn't attracted the police in the first place."

"Fires?"

"Fires yeah, didn't I say? Apparently a forest ranger on fire surveillance spotted the fires in the woods and alerted the police, thinking it was kids messing about."

"But when they got there they found those loonies and the tree stump surrounded with small fires.

If you ask me they were burning some kind of drug. Smelt real weird, like a sugary kipper smell and the flames were blue-green coloured"

"That would explain it." Herbert said nodding his head, "We get junkies all the time in here. One whiff of P.C.P and they think there Superman and jump off the nearest building to see how far they can fly." He clapped his hands together, "SPLAT!! Then we get all the pieces".

"Yeah well, I'd better get back to the cab before 'The Bear' beats me to it and gives him something else to bitch about."

He picked up the stretcher and was just about to leave when he hesitated, glanced at the crucifix protruding from the girls torn vagina, then turned to Herbert, "You have to remove that thing?"

Herbert shook his head, "Ah ah, I'm just an orderly. I tag 'em, file 'em and see that none of them runs away." He smiled at the last part. A well used joke.

Marty ignored the humour and nodded sagely, "Lucky you. The texture of that wood! I reckon her entire insides will follow it out."

He took one last solemn look at Herbert's frozen smile and left.

Alone. Herbert walked all round the table, his eyes following the soft sweeps of the girl's body. She really was beautiful.

He tentatively reached out and touched one breast.

Solid!

The body was in the full throws of Rigor mortis. It would be twenty-four hours before it would revert to its limp state.

He quickly entered her details, such as they were, into the register.

Draw No: Thirteen.

Name: (unknown) Registered as, Jane Smith.

Address: (unknown)

Next of kin: (unknown)

Time of arrival: Three thirty-four A.M.

Reference: Police murder victim.

That done, Herbert put the girls body into the draw and was just closing it when he stopped and drew back the cover to look at the girls face again. Something bothered him. He couldn't quite put his finger on it but something....

It was a proud face with high cheek bones in the classic style. A slightly flattened nose and large pouting lips.

What a waste!

With a deep sigh Herbert closed the draw. And then it struck him what it was that bothered him.

People suffering violent deaths usually had the last fleeting look of agony locked onto their faces by rigor mortis.

But the girls face, though still locked in the first throws of death, had been completely devoid of any trace of pain!

CHAPTER TWO

ECSTACY

Herbert opened his eyes and there she was at the foot of his bed, watching him. The early rays of the rising sun streaming through the window highlighting her dark tan skin with burnished gold.

Afraid to even draw breath, Herbert swallowed hard, and stared up into her cat green eyes. She smiled, her luscious full lips parting to exposing perfect teeth, gleaming, almost incandescently white in the morning shadows.

He tried to open his mouth to ask why and more importantly how! she could to be there, whole and unmarked. When only a few hours ago he'd seen her stone cold body, still cruelly impaled on a cross, locked away in draw thirteen. But all that issued from his mouth was some half-mumbled unintelligible groan.

The smile broadened as the woman he'd dubbed Jane Smith, silenced him with one finger placed to her tantalising lips.

Then she began to rise. Slowly with arms outstretched she floated up from the floor till her curly black hair brushed the ceiling with her feet level with the end of the bed.

Herbert watched mesmerised. She was totally naked. His eyes travelled hungrily down over her breasts, her flat stomach, to the sweet flare of her hips cradling the smooth hairless pubis mons, above the undamaged glistening private folds of her sex.

Then slowly she tipped forward. Like a swimmer in slow motion diving from a high board, she swooped towards him.

She stopped abruptly to float horizontally a foot above him.

His breath caught in his throat, his heart hammering, as he pressed his head back into the pillow away from the hovering face that smiled down at him.

Then with a voice like crushed silk she spoke.

"Herbieeeeeeee! I neeeeeed yooooooooou."

"No it's not real!" Herbert closed his eyes and shook his head in denial, "It's a dream you're not really here!"

A soft girl-like giggle filled the room before changing to a huskier, sexier, more persuasive tone.

"Of course I'm here Herbie. Open your eyes and see!"

"No no no. It's a dream nothing but a dr..."

His eyes shot open as he felt two slender hands caress his cheeks. She was still there, floating.

"There! You see Herbie I am here after all." she said mockingly.

He could smell her breath, tinged with the aroma of exotic spices wafting over him.

"B-but how? You were.... Were dead!"

She threw back her head and laughed, her body rocking as if suspended in water.

"Didn't they tell you I was a witch?"

Herbert nodded silently, his eyes never leaving hers.

"Well let me let you in on a secret Herbie. I'm not just a witch! I'm one of the chosen. A bride of Satan himself. One chosen to walk the land for eternity doing my masters mischief."

"W-what do you want with me?"

"I need you Herbie. I need you to bring me something.

You see the ritual was interrupted. The marriage ceremony unfinished. We had only just completed the blasphemous returning of the Christ child back to the whores' body. When those fools arrived and stopped the ritual before the giving of eternal life could be bestowed on me.

My Disciple and the 'Staff of Life' removed from me at the very zenith of my transition."

"And now *you* must bring it to me Herbie. Bring me the 'Staff of Life'!"

She smiled seductively, "Do this for me and no more will you have to thrust your seed into the decaying dead."

She laughed aloud at his stunned expression. "Yes Herbie, my master knows you! Knows of all your secrets your.... transgressions?" She lifted one eyebrow, "And he is pleased. That's why he honours you with the task of assisting in the completion of the ritual"

"Do this for me and I will show you such pleasures...."

She sank lower, the tips of her breasts resting lightly against his chest. Then slowly without taking her eyes away from his, she began rolling her shoulders, allowing her swollen nipples to glide over him. She moved to position her nipples directly over his, then taking hold of each breast, she rubbed their nipples together, quicker and quicker, sending tingling waves of pleasure coursing through his body.

Herbert moaned opening and closing his eyes dreamily. Then opened them wide as he felt her nipples sliding up towards his head. He looked down and could see her hanging, udder like breast coming nearer and nearer.

He felt like he was at the bottom of a pool looking up at swimmer idly moving across its surface with a mere movement of the hands.

Then he felt the hard nub of her nipple slide over his cheek and around his lips, circling, circling just out of reach of his slavering mouth. He snapped at the tormenting nipple trying to draw it into his eager mouth, only to find it moving always just out of reach.

Herbert could hear her softly chuckling as she continued to tease him with the evasive nipple.

Growling with frustration he reached up and grabbed the breast roughly, forcing the dark bud into his hungry mouth and sucking hard on it like a starving infant to its mother.

The nipple felt enormous in his mouth, he brushed his tongue against it, tasting the slightly salty tang of her flesh. He heard her cooing in his ear, felt her hands cradling his head to her breast. He took the other breast in his hand and gently squeezed. It was soft and springy and warm. In all his life he had never felt the pleasures of a woman's warm soft tits, and it intoxicated him.

More he must have more! He began digging his fingers deep into the yielding flesh with more and more urgency. And still she cooed and whispered encouragement in his ear.

"Take. Take what you want. Yes more, take more. Only bring me the 'Staff of Life'. Will you Herbie? will you bring it to me?"

He didn't know how or where he would ever find what she wanted, but his senses were so inflamed he was incapable of refusing, "Yes, mmm-mmmm yes anything, mmm-mmm. Anything!" he managed to say between slobbering mouthfuls.

Then suddenly he felt her move away. The nipple sliding from his mouth, the breasts slipping from his fingers.

A feeble whine escaped from his lips as her body moved from his reach. She was going. It was all over!

Then with sudden elation he realised she wasn't leaving at all, she was rotating. Like a fish she swirled in the air above him. Turning top to tail.

Herbert now looked up into the cleft between her thighs.

And as he looked up at the clean-shaven flesh, so she slowly opened her legs. The lips of her vagina opening like the petals of some exotic pink orchid.

His mind swam, he couldn't believe it. Tentatively he reached up and ran his middle finger gently in the silky crease. He took his finger away and rubbed it against his thumb. His two fingers slid over the clear lubricant glistening there in the morning light. He put his finger to his nose and breathed deeply, the musky aroma inflamed him. Reaching up again he pressed his finger harder in the soft folds of her sex. Harder and harder he rubbed, till his finger pushed past the restraining muscle and slid inside the tight welcoming sleeve.

In. Out. In. Out. He could feel the suction on his skin, hear the slurping as it slipped back and forth. In. Out. In. Out.

The dead had never been like this, the warmth the softness the delicious smell.

He pushed two fingers in. Three. Four. He felt he could thrust his whole hand up into the tightly ribbed hole that gripped him and she would except it with a smile.

He withdrew his fingers, then stretching the lips of her vagina wide, craned his head up to meet it.

Hesitantly he extended his tongue, closer closer. There!

Salty/sweet! He licked again. He would never have believed that, this part of a woman could ever be that sweet. Inhibitions gone now, he buried his face deep in her sex. Driving his tongue deep inside her. He took hold of her hips pulling her on to him, his head moving from side to side, his cheeks slick with her juices as he frantically tried to get even closer.

Herbert suddenly froze, his body tensing as he felt the bedclothes slide down his body. He looked down the bed and saw her upside down head smiling back at him, felt her fingers hook in the band of his underpants and slowly push them down.

His hard penis, free of its confinement sprang up, throbbing back and forth to the rapid beat of his heart.

She took it in her cool hands and gently stroked it. One hand sliding down to its base then gently cupping his balls.

Herbert gasped in anticipation as he saw her head dip.

An almost impossibly long tongue slid from his mouth and curled itself around his hot shaft.

Slowly she ran her satin soft tongue up and down, licking the sensitive skin with consummate skill. Then taking his scrotum in her mouth she gently kneaded the testicles with her agile tongue. Herbert lay back rigid, his whole body quivering. Again her tongue returned to his shaft, this time to the tip.

She kissed the end chastely before sliding her tongue under his foreskin and circled his knob with its probing tip.

Herbert had never experienced anything like it, somehow she was managing to excite him beyond endurance, yet at the same time prolong the pleasure without giving him release.

Then just when he thought he would go mad. He felt it rising. Coming like an express train, he could feel it coming closer.

Yes yes at last it was coming. He bit his lip in anticipation. Closer, closer, CLOSER!!

Then suddenly her mouth was gone.

He looked down in desperation. She was smiling at him.

"You won't forget?" she said teasingly, "The 'Staff of Life'. Bring it to me."

"Yes yes anything only please don't stop. Pleasssssssse!!!"

Her smile broadened slightly, then she dipped and took his whole shaft in her mouth.

Herbert groaned as he felt her tongue again play round his throbbing penis. He could feel her sharp teeth teasing the swollen gland, feel her silky lips sliding up and down, sucking, sucking.

Now 'it' was coming, drawn from its seat by her insatiable lips. Harder and harder.

He thrashed his hips driving deeper into her throat, more more more...Yes..yes..YES

Y-E-S...AGH- Aghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.....

.....BRINGGGGGGG-inggggggg-ingggggg.

Herbert sat bolt upright in the bed, the clanging alarm clock on the bedside table vibrating up and down insistently.

Instinctively he reached out and punched the stop button.

The room was silent. And empty.

Through the window the afternoon sun streamed at its brightest.

Herbert frowned, picked up the clock and squinted at its fingers.

Five-o'clock!

He washed the sleep from his face with his hand, and again peered

incredulously at the time. There was no mistake!

What had happened? A moment ago it had been morning and the girl called Jane Smith had been here, and she'd been.....

Herbert jumped out of bed and searched the flat. Nothing! All the doors locked windows shut and no one hiding anywhere.

He came back into his bedroom and slumped down on the bed.

A dream? Is that all it was? The image of her hovering above him had seemed so real. He could still taste her, feel the soft yielding flesh beneath his fingers.

But there was no sign of her, nor anything to indicate that she'd *ever* been here.

He held his fingers to his nose and breathed deeply, expecting, hoping! To smell the musky aroma of her sex on his skin, but all there was, was the ever-present tang of disinfectant that never seemed to leave him.

So it was a dream! he thought sadly. Perhaps it was just as well though! Her disciple and presumably the 'Staff of Life' were locked away in police custody and quite unobtainable anyway! He looked down at the sticky wet patch on the mattress and chuckled. But a hell of a convincing dream

It had been years since he'd had a 'wet dream'. Since his school days in fact. Before that is he'd learnt the pleasures of his hand, and later the bodies of his inmates.

"Christ I hope I have that dream again tomorrow." he said softly to himself. Promising himself to make it the last thing he thought about before falling to sleep, in the hopes it might trigger a re-enactment.

But that was tomorrow. He still had seven hours before he was due back on duty and another eight hours after that before he could put it to the test.

David Holmes looked up from his paper as Herbert entered the morgue. Sitting with his feet on the desk and evening paper spread across his lap, he looked up at the clock.

"You're early tonight Herbie. What happened, shit the bed?" he asked with a grin. "You aren't due on for another half hour yet!"

"Yeah I know, but I was at a loose end, and I remembered you said there was a fight on the telly you wanted to watch. So I thought... what the hell!"

David looked stunned for a second, then quickly put his feet to the ground and stared at Herbert in astonishment.

"You mean you'll stand in for me early?!"

Herbert shrugged, "If you like. Of course if you'd rather finish your shift.....?"

David was on his feet, "No no, that's fine. That's real thoughtful of you Herbie...HerBERT!! I really appreciate it."

Herbert almost smiled as he watched David struggling to get out of his white coat as quickly as possible, before presumably he could change his mind.

David was almost running, stuffing his things in his locker with careless abandon, and all the time talking, talking.

"This is really good of you Herbert. I mean this fight is a realllll big one. Benn against Eubank. *LIVE!*"

"I'd set the tape up for it of course, but you know.." he shrugged his shoulders, "it 'aint the same!"

Throwing his coat over his shoulder he marched briskly to the door, "Thanks again Herbert. If ever you want a favour, just ask!"

He was almost out the door when Herbert stopped him.

"David?!"

David turned warily and eyed Herbert suspiciously, convinced it was all some awful practical joke.

"Is there anything I should know? New admissions? Special instructions?"

David sighed with relief, "No just a typical Tuesday, all's quiet."

"How about....Number thirteen?"

David's face creased up, "The impaling? No she's still here."

"Have they removed the....?"

"Nope! Forensic boys haven't finished with her yet." He made a big show of looking at his watch, "If there's nothing else?"

Herbert smiled, "No that's all. Enjoy the fight!"

David beamed at him, "Thanks Herbert. 'Night!" and then he was gone his feet skipping down the corridor as he hurried on his way.

Herbert stood in the sterile room with only the steady buzz of the neon lights for company. Inexorably his gaze was drawn to draw thirteen.

Wiping his sweaty hands down his trousers he made his way to the draw and taking the handle drew it open.

He pulled back the sheet and there she was. The same bushy 'affro' hairstyle, the same pouting lips, the full breasts with dark aureoles. He pulled

the sheet further down and smiled nodding to himself, "A dream after all!" he said, as he saw the cross still firmly imbedded in her crotch.

He looked up at the clock. 11:45. Still over three hours to go before the quiet hour.

He was just shutting the draw when something caught his eye. He stopped dead as his heart leapt into his mouth.

In the tight curls of her hair, just around the crown, were tiny specks of fine white dust. The image of her floating up seared his mind, her hair brushing the whitewashed ceiling of his flat, magnified in his mind like a zoom camera. No it couldn't be!

Then he noticed the same powder on her nails and sighed with relief. He chuckled to himself for being so easily spooked.

Fingerprint dust! He'd seen it before! Many a rapist had been caught and convicted on fingerprints taken from the shiny back of the victims fingernails. Only this time some careless bugger had spilt some on her head. He smiled down at the body called Jane Smith, blew it a kiss and whispered, "See you later alligator!" then bursting into a fit of giggles shut the draw and sat down at the desk and waited.

By 2:45 he could stand it no longer. Taking the trolley he transferred the body to the table.

Herbert slowly walked all around the body, stopping at her head.

With one finger he caressed her soft lips. His penis throbbing with the memory of those lips sliding over the taught skin.

That had been a dream, but now....!

Taking off his white coat, he rolled it into a ball and placed it under her head, forcing it forward. Then having removed his trousers and underpants, climbed onto the table and positioned his eager shaft between her lips.

Forcing her jaws apart with his fingers, he slid his hot member into the cold welcoming embrace of her mouth.

He flinched slightly as her teeth scratched against his sensitive knob.

Then he began to ride. Rocking backwards and forwards. In, out, in, out. He couldn't help feeling disappointed. Her dream tongue had been warm, slick and very inquisitive. But now it just lay in there like a large dead maggot. So he closed his eyes and imagined how it had been in the dream. Better! Much much better!!

He began to move faster, thrusting deeper and deeper. Faster, faster. More more! MORE!!

Almost there! Quicker quicker! He got ready to withdraw, not daring to

come inside her in case the forensic boys found it.

Just a couple more, nearly, nearly NEARLY! NOW!!

He tried to withdraw, but the girl's jaws suddenly clamped down. The sudden jolt of pain triggering his ejaculation.

Damn!! A muscular spasm. He'd seen it before, muscles locked under strain by rigor mortis, suddenly releasing as it dissipated. But now of all times!

Shit!! Now he would have to try and clear it up before it was found.

He put his thumbs on the girl's lower jaw and pushed down.

It wouldn't budge. He tried pressing harder but the teeth cut painfully into the soft pads of his thumbs. So trying a different tack he placed one hand on her forehead the other on her chin. Then leaning forward put all his weight onto them. He knew using this much force would probably snap her jaw, but he had no choice.

He knew also that these death spasms were like steel traps and if he couldn't get out...Well the morning shift would certainly have a field day.

Again and again he brought his weight down, all to no avail. His prick was firmly stuck!

He sat back panting. Perhaps when his penis shrank back down to its normal size.....

He knelt over her waiting, praying there wouldn't be an emergency admission before he'd extricated himself.

"Come on! Come onnnnnn!! Hurry up and..."

He suddenly caught his breath as he felt something rub against his trapped penis. Something inside the girl's mouth!

He stared dumbfounded into the girl's face beneath him.

His heart missed a beat as if clutched by a giant hand as the girl's eyelids slowly slid open.

Herbert's scream locked in his windpipe, as he looked into the twin, bottomless black eye sockets. Blacker than black, deeper than the reaches of Hell itself.

And as he stared into their blackness, so the corners of her mouth pulled up into a hideous grin.

He tried desperately to pull out. Her teeth tearing the tender skin of his foreskin, but he had to get away!

Then suddenly he felt two slender, but incredibly strong hands grab his buttocks. Sharp nails digging into their flaccid cheeks and pulling him on to

her waiting mouth.

For a split second she released her hold on his penis, then opening her mouth, unbelievably wide, she lunged forward taking the whole of his penis and balls in her mouth and bit down hard. Herbert had managed to turn a little at the last moment, but instead of freeing himself, only managed to get one testicle caught between her closing jaws.

A bolt of sheer white agony filled him as her teeth bit down into it. All the strength drained from his body as the all-encompassing pain surged through him. Almost on the point of passing out, his sphincter gave way. He vaguely heard her gulping as urine ran freely from his ensnared penis and warm excrement plopped down between her breasts.

Feebly he began beating at her head. Cold and puttylike, it had no effect.

Another, even worse bolt of pain flared as her teeth began to grind back and forth in a sawing action. He threw back his head and howled in agony as her teeth tore relentlessly into his flesh.

Then suddenly he was free. No longer tethered to the abomination before him, he staggered off the table.

As he hit the floor his legs gave out on him and he stumbled to the wall for support. He could feel warm blood running down his legs. Summoning his courage, he looked down at himself.

And screamed.

His entire genitals had been bitten completely off!

Blood was pouring from the mangled flesh of his groin in spurts. He knew that meant an artery was severed and that unless it was stopped, he would soon bleed to death where he stood.

He grabbed hold of the wound with both hands to try and staunch the flow, but the blood continued to squirt unabated between his fingers, hot and sticky. Next he tried to stagger out to get help, but his legs refused to move and he slid helplessly to the floor instead.

As he sat against the wall, his lifeblood flowing relentlessly between his fingers, a noise near the table drew his attention.

The body on the table still lay motionless, dead! Then suddenly it convulsed, the back arching up, then dropping down with a wet slapping noise. Again another convulsion and another.

A deep gut wrenching howl rose from the girl as she writhed on the table,

her legs thrust out straight, her toes straining towards the ceiling as her legs shook violently causing her heels beat out a tattoo on the table.

At first Herbert thought the blood loss was making him hallucinate, But the more he stared the certain he became. It was no illusion. The crucifix was slowly being pushed out of her body.

The traversing bar was down to her knees now and the girls thrashing became more and more frantic. Her howling turning to huskier laughter. Then with a loud relieved "Aghhhhh....", the heavy cross fell from her body to the floor with a loud 'clump'.

Herbert could see the cross plainly at his feet. He noted with numb curiosity its freshly sharpened end without a trace of blood on it anywhere! His gaze travelled up to the figure on the cross, now nothing but a withered skeleton. An emaciated bag of bones that looked barely human.

His head rolled back, his eyes closing as the loss of blood took its toll. He felt so incredibly weak!

A soft chuckle awoke him, opening his heavy eyelids he saw crouching before him, wearing his abandoned white coat was the thing he'd named Jane Smith.

The empty blackness had left her eyes. Now they shone with the same emerald hue as in the dream, bright, sparkling with new found life.

"Thank you Herbie!" she said with a grin, "I knew I could count on you. Oh and of course I'll keep my promise. You won't have to fuck anymore dead bodies. Of course you won't be fucking anybody else either, but then I never said you would did I?" Her smile broadened.

Herbert groaned and clutched his wound tighter. She tapped his hands reassuringly, "And don't worry about that Herbie! That will take you to a very good friend of mine. In fact he's more than a friend, he's my new husband. And he's been waiting for you Herbie. He's been waiting a long time."

She suddenly threw back her head and laughed aloud, and for just an instant Herbert saw. And his blood ran cold.

Wedge in the back of her throat Herbie could see the ragged end of his own penis, it was still throbbing as if still attached to his body. The penis that had given her life.

'The Staff of Life' his! Staff of Life.

And then she was gone and he was alone.

He tried calling for help, but his voice was so feeble he knew no one would hear him way down here. But there was still a chance if only someone would come and find him. With Casualty just across the way, they'd soon

patch him up and stick a few pints of blood back in him.

He tried to ignore the spreading pool of blood that surrounded him and fixed his mind on what he would do when he was better.

He would tell the world. Warn them of the creatures like her walking the earth, creating trouble wherever they went. He may end up in prison, or an asylum, but that was all right! Just as long as he got the chance to get his own back, and somehow atone for his sins, depriving the devil of his soul and an eternity in Hell.

Yes he could make it all come right. He could be saved!

If only someone would come! *Soon!!*

Using all his strength he turned his head, a head that weighed a hundred tons, and tried to focus on the clock.

Tears coursed down his cheeks and he slowly began to weep. His one small hope draining away like his blood.

It was only 3:15

The quiet hour.....

THE END.

GHOSTS MOON

“Round and round in circles.

Like a wheel with in a wheel ”

Anthony Newley (Windmills of your mind)

The old bungalow cowered beneath the brittle moonlight, its foundations taking refuge in the deep overgrown garden. Whilst its ebony black eyes peered out from paint peeled window frames, staring corpse like at the two small boys crouched down amid the invading foliage.

"It don't look haunted!" Johnny whispered.

"Tis though! Everybody knows that!" chided Lucas. His spectacles shining like silver mirrors in the moonlight as he faced his friend. "You heard what they said in the playground. About what 'appened to old man Davis and his Mrs on the day they were supposed to move in! How they was found dead in this very place, With no one knowin' how or why they was here, or 'ow they come to die without a mark on 'em!

Scared to death by somethin' 'orrible! My Dad reckons"

"Yeah..., well" said Johnny averting his eyes and nervously picking bits of skin from his scuffed knees, his short trousers proving a bad choice for the nights excursion. "My Mom says that's just a story."

He brushed his sandy hair from his eyes and looked again at the reason for leaving his nice warm bed on this cold November night. All on account of some stupid double dare, he'd not only risked serious injury in scrabbling down the drainpipe but sever punishment if his parents found out.

"I mean look at it! It's just an ordinary bungalow." he protested.

The two seven year old boys studied the house.

It *was* ordinary, no rattling shutters or creaking door hinges, no ugly gargoyles leering evilly down from dark overhanging parapets. A simple bungalow, apart from it's obvious neglect, no better or worse than any other in the lane.

Lucas shrugged, making his ample stomach bounce jelly like. "Okay. John-o. So it don't look like much. BUT! How come no one lives here?" He sneered poking his friend's shoulder with one podgy finger, "Ay, Mr Clever Clogs. You tell me why no one wants to live here, if it's not haunted?" He prodded again.

"How should I know?" complained Johnny rubbing his shoulder. "But my Mom says there's no such thing as ghosts."

"*My Mom, my Mom.*" Lucas mimicked, "Is that all you can say? I'm telling you there *is* a ghost! And we're going to find it!"

"Now! You coming? Or are you going to chicken out?"

"I 'aint no chicken!" Johnny said indignantly "I've come this far 'aven't I?"

"Right well stop moanin' and follow me."

The two boys set off slowly across the garden. Johnny already spooked, warily eyed a tall Hydrangea bush. Its decaying florets strangely alien in the stark moonlight. Faces with crooked evil grins and jet black eyes, watching him! Yearning for him! Hungering for him!

Johnny risked a glance over his shoulder as they past, and almost yelled aloud as the flower heads, suddenly, stirred by the breeze, swayed angrily towards him as if trying to catch his shirt tails and drag him back to their lair. Johnny surged forward, then...

"HEY!! Watch it!!" Lucas complained, as Johnny slammed into the back of him.

"Sorry, Luc'" said Johnny in a hushed breathless voice, "I..I didn't know you'd stopped!"

"Yeah well be more careful you could have smashed my glasses."

"Sorry Luc', but why'd yer stop? We 'aint at the house yet?"

Lucas smiled broadly, his teeth fluorescent white in the dark.

"No. But look what I've found!"

Lucas stepped aside to reveal a circular wall, some four feet in diameter and two feet high, its top covered with ancient moss covered timbers.

Johnny frowned, "What is it?"

Lucas looked skywards and shook his head, "Jeez! John-o you are dumb sometimes. Haven't you ever seen a well before? "

"I 'aint dumb,!" Johnny pouted, then thrusting his chin out added, "An I bet I've seen more wells than you have!"

"Yeah, like when?"

"Loads of times and better than this one." He gave it a little kick, "This is probably one of them false ones they use for decoration!"

"Yer? Well only one way to find out!" said Lucas with a grin as he began pulling the planking from the well and dropping it noisily on the ground.

"Shhhhhh," Johnny said urgently, "Someone might hear us."

Lucas hesitated, "Like who? The nearest house is the other side of the lane." Then in mock horror stared goggled eyed and whispered. "Unless you mean, *old Mr and Mrs Davis!*"

Johnny sniggered, "No I told you, there's no such thing as ghosts!"

"Well come on then, give us a hand."

The two boys having uncovered the well peered down into its private darkness.

"Pew! Smells a bit!" Johnny exclaimed as the well breathed its foetid odour into the chill night air.

"Smells like my Dad's socks," ventured Lucas, wriggling his nose in disgust. Johnny broke out in giggles as he visualised a halo of flies circling a pair of large crossed feet with one big toe poking out through a hole in a sock.

"It's probably full of dirty water." Lucas said

"Maybe. It's hard to tell. I can't see a thing, it's too dark!" moaned Johnny.

"No, nor me... hang on a minute!" Lucas bent down and scavenged in the dirt. Then leaning over the well dropped a large stone into its yawning mouth.

For what seemed an eternity they strained their eyes and ears, trying to follow its progress down into the stygian shadow.

Finally a 'BA- DOOOOOSH' echoed up from the depths followed by the sound of waves slapping angrily against the walls in protest at been so rudely awoken.

Johnny backed away from the well, a tinge of fear etched on his face, "I..I don't like it, there's something.... something?" he looked up anxiously, "Can we go now?"

"Go? Why? It's only an old well. I think it's neat!"

"Please Luc', lets go."

"You 'aint scared are you?" Lucas sneered.

"No it's just that.... Well I..." his voice trailed off.

Lucas beamed at him "You are! Scared 'aint yer. Yer big softie there's nout to be scared of, watch!" and with that Lucas climbed on to the well and with arms spread began walking around the edge.

"Luc come on down" said Johnny with an even greater sense of foreboding.

"Hey John-o look I'm really scared. Ooooooh" He began swaying alarmingly, shaking his legs in mock horror,

"It's really scari...."

CRACCCCK!!!

A piece of wall suddenly crumbled under his feet turning Lucas's smiling face into a mask of horror as he began to topple, arms waving wildly, into the well.

Johnny lunged for his pal. Thought for one awful second that he was to late, but then with immense relief felt Lucas's jerkin in his clenched hand. His relief was short lived however as he felt himself being dragged into the well too. He looked into the terror filled eyes of his pal and for one brief second considered letting go. Then with presence of mind well beyond his years he jammed his knees painfully into the side of the well and threw all his weight back. He heard the sound of stitches popping, material tearing. Pain sang in his fingers as he struggled to hang on. The sharp stone edge drew blood as it bit into the already scuffed skin of his knees. And still he was been drawn closer and closer. Finally like two halves of a seesaw they pivoted on the well wall swaying precariously first one way then the other. Then with a strangled cry of desperation Johnny gave one final yank, and suddenly found himself crashing to the ground with Lucas toppling on top of him.

After a few moments the boys, breathing hard, sat upright and rested their backs against the well wall.

Lucas put a hand on his pal's shoulder, "Hey thanks John-o. I... I thought I'd had it then!" he said shakily.

"I thought we both had had it!" corrected Johnny. "Look Luc I've had enough. Let's go home?"

Lucas seemed on the point of agreeing, but instead said lamely " But we haven't seen the ghost yet!"

"I don't care about the ghost or the house anymore! I just want to go home!!"

"But we're almost there now" he said, pointing to the house just a few yards away. "We can't come this close and not look! Can we?"

Johnny looked to the house for a moment, then with a sigh of resignation said, "Okay one quick look at the house then we go; Right!"

Lucas beamed at him, the arrogance of youth already blanking out his close call. "Anything you say John-o. Come on lets go!"

The two made their way to the front of the house and peered through the window.

"What makes you think there'll be a ghost tonight anyway?" asked Johnny, squinting through the dirty glass.

"There's a full moon that's why, ghosts always go back to where they died when there's a full moon." Lucas said brushing a cobweb from the window frame so as to look closer.

"Why?"

Lucas huffed irritably, "Because they don't know there dead! Jeez! John-o don't you ever watch them old movies on the telly, it's all there!?"

Johnny not wanting to admit his parents wouldn't let him stay up late, changed the subject quickly. "Well there's no ghosts here now. It's like I said all along, there's no such thing as gho....!"

Suddenly out of the darkness, an old woman's face appeared on the other side of the glass. Deathly white it stared at them for a moment. Then silently drifted towards the door.

Lucas and Johnny stared petrified as the handle of the door slowly, slowly started to turn.

They looked at each other in horror for a second, then as one they bolted hell for leather back towards the well.

Martha Davis stepped out into the night, frowning. She was sure she had seen someone or something.....

She jumped in shock putting a hand to her heart as Wilf, her husband, came up behind her and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Hey easy Martha! It's only me. Remember what the doctor said about sudden shocks!"

"ME!" she said playfully smacking his hand. "YOUR! The one that wants to watch himself! Why you couldn't let the carpet people measure up instead of exerting yourself I don't know. You're not as young as you used to be."

"Huh those 'Cowboys' were supposed to have measured up this afternoon but didn't show up! Well, their not going to use that as an excuse to avoid putting our carpet down on time. We move in tomorrow afternoon come what may! So I want to be down at their office first thing in the morning with the sizes. Even if it means I have stay here all night with a tape measure in one hand and a torch in the other."

She smiled, "You could have had the power connected!"

"Huh. More 'cowboys'" He sniffed indignantly.

"Still you should be more careful. You know what the doctor said, your hearts no stronger than mine. So take it easy I don't know what I'd do if I lost you "

"Nor I you" He said slipping his arms around her waist. "After forty seven

years together I've kinder got used to you." he said brushing his face against the side of her head.

She leaned back into him and smiled, covering his hands with her own. "We really are a pair of old softies aren't we?"

Her smile faded as her gaze centred on the well. "You will keep your promise and have that horrible thing filled in won't you?"

"What... the old well? Yes, yes of course I will. As soon as we move in." he kissed the silvery hair on the top of her head.

He paused, concern furrowing his brow, "Is that what was bothering you when I came out?"

"Well sort of, it's just that I thought I saw... that is it looked like..." She sighed softly. "You'll probably think I'm being silly but you know what the estate agent told us about this place. About... about the..."

"...Two small boys that drowned in the well." he finished for her.

"Yes, well... I think I just saw them?!"

Wilf stunned, slowly took his wife by the shoulders and turned her to face him.

"Now Martha I know this place looks a little spooky in the dark, but don't start imagining things. If I've told you once I've told you a hundred times.

"There's no such thing as ghosts!"

THE END

THE PROWLER

**“Look not into the darkness for evil.
Be sure it waits there for you!”**

Anon

Corrine hugged her coat tightly round her neck, deriving small, but welcome comfort from the shell of warmth it provided. The clicking of her high heels echoed around the empty street making it seem even more frighteningly deserted than it really was. Dead leaves danced around her legs as she hurried past the iron railings of the park. On the other side, the trees swished in the cold night air, calling in soft whispers to their fallen children as if urging them to return to the place that bore them.

Tears rolled down her cheeks, leaving twin trails of smudged mascara in their wake.

Damn them!! Damn them all! Men? They were all the same! Why do they do it. WHY?

Ray had seemed so keen to see her again, and now...? Just as she was beginning to hope things might be different this time, she'd been stood up again!

She slumped onto a bench outside the park entrance. Rummaged in her handbag, withdrew a crumpled tissue and blew her nose noisily. With eyes heavily laden with tears she looked bay fully to the sky.

*Why? OK I'm not the prettiest girl in the world, and my figures nothing to shout about. But I'm a NICE person. Surely that counts for **something**?*

But in her heart she knew why. *'Didn't come across' that's why! Nowadays if you didn't play ball after the first two or three dates, you didn't get a fourth.* And pretending to want to see you again was either their way of getting back at you, or an easy way out for those without the guts to say otherwise.

Throwing the used tissue into the waste bin, she took a deep breath to compose herself, and stood up.

A twig snapped behind her. Corrine spun around her breath catching in her throat as she peered into the cloying darkness that nestled between the trees.

Crack.

There it was again! Someone was hiding in the darkness she was sure.

PROWLER.

The word sprang unbidden into her mind. Suddenly she remembered the newscasts over the last few weeks.

...Several women have been attacked and assaulted in the area surrounding Cannock Park...

Corrine quickly looked up at the sign over the entrance.

CANNOCK PARK.!

Her hand flew to her mouth, "Oh my God" She peered back into the darkness.

Something moved!.

Then she was running, gulping in large breaths of cold damp air, her legs pumping frantically, propelling her down the street.

Her ears strained for the slightest noise behind her. Was that someone chasing her or just an echo of her own feet? One thing was for certain, she wasn't stopping to find out!

She cursed herself for leaving it so long before returning home. But she was so sure Ray would turn up, so she'd waited and waited, finally going to the pictures on her own in defiance.

And now it was dark and the streets were quiet and in all probability the local maniac had her marked down for his next victim.

If she could just make it to her car she'd be alright.

HER CAR!!

A sick feeling settled in her stomach as she remembered where she was heading. Cannock Park's own car park!

It meant having to enter the park to reach it. She had counted on Ray walking her back, but now... she was alone!

She reached the other entrance gasping for breath, the back of her throat felt raw and there was the taste of blood in her mouth.

She glanced quickly over her shoulder, full expecting to see a snarling psychopath bearing down on her.

No one. The street was deserted.

She exhaled nervously, her breath making rolling clouds that surrounded her. She looked down the drive to the car park. One solitary sodium lamp high above cast a small pool of shifting yellow light through the overhanging trees. If Ray had been with her, it would have been very romantic. Walking down the leafy drive, both enjoying the simple pleasure of holding hands.

But he wasn't! And now it was a nightmare offering a thousand dark places for her deepest fears to hide.

Now get a hold of your self Corrine, don't start imagining things. It's not very far, sixty yards at the most.

She took the car keys from her bag, found the one for the door and held it ready, tightly in both hands.

One quick look to the sky, in the forlorn hope that the elusive moon would escape it's smothering grey captor. Only to feel fine drizzle floating down, tickling her face and dislodging a lock of hair with its deceptive weight.

No such luck!

She looked at the drive, its surface was covered with a million banana skins for Cocco the clown to slip on.

And Cocco was wearing her best stiletto heels, just to make sure!

She didn't like the idea of taking them off, but her calves burned with the exertion of running this far in them, and the consequences of slipping at a vital time, just didn't bear thinking about. So....

Off they came! She gasped as the cold pavement hungrily leeched the heat from her soles. Her toes stood to attention, reluctant to take the plunge onto the wet surface.

Suddenly she felt very silly, standing there in the street, barefoot, car key in one hand, shoes in the other.

Why not walk back to the town and get a taxi. I could fetch the car tomorrow when it's light.

She sighed with relief and laughed to herself. *Dumb! Why didn't I think of that before I got my feet wet and ruined my new tights as well!*

She was bending to replace her shoe's when a sudden noise brought her head up quickly. A large man clamber over the railings and dropped to the ground some twenty feet in away from her.

She froze, her mouth suddenly very dry. His back was towards her but she could see he was a big man with a mass of bedraggled long hair. His clothes were dirty and ragged and hung across his huge frame like an old blanket.

As he started to turn, Corrine broke out of her paralysing shock and quickly took refuge behind a parked car. She peered around the back of the car just as his turning face became bathed in the street lights. Corrine gasped in horror, his face was thick and puffy, sunken beady eyes accompanied a large bulbous nose that sat on his face like some hideous tumour. A zigzagging scar slashed across his cheek reached from the left ear down to his large protruded unshaven jaw.

She knelt there staring silently at hideous giant before her, Corrine, realising she was holding her breath, slowly, quietly, afraid that the noise might provoke an attack, released it in a whisper.

She watched mesmerised as the man's hand slid into his jacket pocket. Her heart leaping into her mouth as he slowly withdrew something shiny that flashed in the lamplight.

KNIFE!!

The thought galvanised her into action. Slipping back quickly behind the car she crouched down to as small as she could. Again she held her breath as the heavy footsteps came nearer and nearer.

Please, please don't let him find me!

He was very close now, she could hear his laboured breathing. He coughed, a loud flemey noise that sound almost like a growl, that scared her to the bone. The footsteps stopped. Corrine slowly stood up a little and peered through the cars window, and quickly crouched down again. He was the other side of the car!

She crouched there holding herself in a tight ball, praying that he would go away and not decide to look around the car.

Corrine's heart was beating so hard she felt sure he could hear it. Then the footsteps continued, moving away. Her whole body sagged with relief.

Soon the footsteps were gone. But Corrine taking no chances continued to hide behind the car. After what seemed ages she finally risked standing up and checking the street.

Empty!

Still shaken by the encounter, Corrine tried to decide which was the safest option to get her home. A taxi? Or car? She looked up the street towards Cannock and the taxi rank. It was at least a quarter of a mile along deserted streets. What if that was the way the giant had gone! Maybe his still up there waiting!. Corrine bit her bottom lip, could she risk it? She looked across the road and down the drive where her car waited for her, sixty yards at best.

Of course the giant could have gone into the park instead, and could be waiting for amid the trees.

Corrine felt like crying with the uncertainty, but she had to do something, she couldn't stay here all night! So forcing herself to think logically she reviewed the options. After a few seconds it came to her, she'd seen the giant *leaving* the park, so it was unlikely that he would have returned to it!

Yes! That was the best cause of action. Her car it was.

Steeling herself, she crossed the road and entered the drive. It was dark and foreboding in here. Dappled light raced back and forth across the drive as the

tree tops swished noisily in the gusting wind. She'd only gone a few yards when a twig snapped behind her!

Wrong choice!

Without turning to look, the darkness forgotten she plunged down the drive. Her bare feet slapping the ground, the toes no longer caring, gripped desperately at its hard, bitterly cold wet surface.

It was like running on a treadmill. She could see her car parked all alone, in the first parking slot nearest the exit.

Thank God!

But no matter how fast she ran, it didn't seem to be getting any nearer. The wind rose like an evil accomplice, lifting an army of rotting minions against her.

Corrine squealed and blinked rapidly as the dead leaves flapped around her face like angry moths. She brushed them from her eyes with her arm, never losing momentum for a second.

But somehow that brief distraction had broken the spell, for now her car seemed much nearer. She was almost there!

The little yellow tin box on wheels had never seemed so beautiful. She could almost imagine a miniature Quasimodo swinging from the wing mirror yelling "Sanctuary, sanctuary" as Charles Laughton had done in 'The Hunchback of Notradame'.

Thirty feet to go!

I'm going to make it!

Twenty!

YES!!

A piece of grit, hidden beneath a mattress of leaves, bit deeply into her right heel. And like the 'Princess and the pea' she felt it...GOD! Did she feel it! She shrieked out loud as a bolt of pure white pain caused her toes and instep to involuntary clench. But her fear was greater than the pain. So holding the injured foot off the ground, she hopped the last ten feet. Praying, to any God that would listen, that there weren't any more little 'surprises' waiting for her to step on.

She reached the car. Her shoes thumped against its roof as she rested her weight against it. The key in her hand looked enormous, much too big to fit in the minute little hole in the door. She stabbed the key at it, and missed! A thin streamer of yellow paint spiralled into the air as the key slid down the door panel.

Shit!!

She stabbed again.

Another yellow ribbon.

Shit. SHIT!! Come on, COME ON!!

The back of Corrine's neck crawled in the expectation of massive hands, that any second, must surely close round it .

Pleeeeeease!!

The key slid smoothly into the lock on the third attempt with a satisfying 'clunk'.

She wrenched the door open, flung herself into the driver's seat, and punched the locking button hard, as the door slammed shut behind her. Only then did she feel safe enough to look through the side window, back the way she had come.

Nothing?

Corrine couldn't believe it, she was so sure...? She glanced quickly left and right of the drive. Screwing her eyes up as she tried to penetrate the darkness.

No one!

She sighed in relief, then began laughing as the tension drained out of her. "Corrie old bean, you'll be jumping at your own shadow next. Twenty-four! And still imagining the boogiemans after you. Tch! You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

She slid the key into the ignition, and put her bare feet on the pedals.

"Ow!" She lent forward, her chin almost resting on the steering wheel, and massaged the injured heel. She removed the piece of grit that was tenaciously clinging to the remains of her sodden tights. Then lifting her hand to the light she inspected her wet fingers. Thankful it was only dirty water and not blood, she replaced one shoe, and then, after first peeling off a dead leaf pasted to her instep, the other.

She sat upright, hand on the steering wheel the other reaching for the key. When a light breeze fluttered across her face swinging the rampant curl like a pendulum. She brushed it back in place with her hand. Then frowned, as it was again dislodged by another invading zephyr. Corrine looked around to find the source of the wind, and was startled to see the passenger window open, just a crack, but open never the less?

She lay across the passenger seat, to reach the winder, and was surprised to find a Polo mint wrapper lying on the passenger seat. She picked it up frowning. How...? She didn't even like mints so how did this get in? Unless.... The gap in the window?

How the hell did it blow through that tiny gap?

She quickly wound up the window tight. Then settling back in her seat, she sat staring at the wrapper, a feeling of unease growing in her stomach.

I'm sure I haven't opened that window recently. Have I?

Suddenly she didn't feel quite so safe, and a look in the rear view mirror only reinforced it. The deep black shadow occupying the area behind the front seats looked deep enough and large enough to hide. What?!

Now get a grip on your self-Corrie, Therese nothing there!

There may be?

NO nothing!

Have a look see?

NO!!

Still scared of the bogie man?

No... O.K, O.K, I'll look!

Corrine turned her head, and slowly peered into the back.

Her heart gave one enormous beat then seemed to stop, as a large worm coloured hand slid out of the darkness and grasped the back of the passenger seat.

She drew in a deep shuddering breath as she recoiled back, the steering wheel stabbing painfully into her side.

The seat creaked under the strain as a dark shape pulled itself up from behind the seat.

"Noooooooo" She sobbed in a high squeaky voice, her head shaking from side to side refusing to believe what her staring eyes showed her. "Nooo, please God noooooo."

An arm reached out towards her, its owner still swathed in the shadow that filled the back of the car.

Corrine stared at the seemingly disembodied hand as it floated like a Cobra dancing lazily for its pipe player in front of her face.

"W-w-what d-do you w-want?" she managed to squeeze through her dry mouth.

Silence, but as if in reply the hand stretched it's fingers and caressed the side of her cheek.

Corrine tried not to flinch away from his touch. "Look I-I've got money, it-it's not much but you can have it all." She snatched up her handbag, hurriedly taking out her purse and fumbling with the catch. "Here you can

have it all" she said offering the open purse to the shadow in the back. "It's not much but there's credit cards in there as well, and I'll tell you the code number if you let me go. I promise I won't tell any..."

Corrine screamed as the hand lashed out, knocking the purse from her hand and scattering the money. The loose change clattered against the windscreen with one small coin ending, in a ever-decreasing drum roll on the dashboard.

The hand clamped over her mouth stifling any further noise. She tried to pull it away, but it only gripped tighter in response, the thumb and forefinger pinching her nose, cutting off her air.

In total panic now, convinced she was about to die, she dragged at the arm with both hands trying to dislodge its ferocious grip.

Suddenly the other hand grabbed her red hair at the back and savagely twisting it, pulled her head into the shadows, where a voice whispered hoarsely into her ear.

"Quite! Bitch! Or do I really have to get rough?"

As Corrine stopped fighting. So the hand relaxed, allowing her to take a deep welcoming breath as the thumb and forefinger released its hold.

Whilst maintaining its painful grip on her hair with one hand, the other slowly slid from her mouth and again began caressing her cheek with soft circular movements. Then it moved to the side, delicately brushing a few strands of hair behind her ear. One finger tracing a path around the ear and down her neck. His fingers unfurling he slid his hand up and down her milk white slender neck.

Corrine gasped and took a deep breath, any second expecting those fingers to tighten and crush the life from her body.

But they didn't, instead they moved further down stopping at the top of her coat.

Corrine unable to move her head looked down her nose at the pink spider that was exploring the top button as if it were a fly it couldn't quite decide how to wrap up.

Then suddenly the fingers pulled at the coat, the thumb working pushed the button from its hole. The hand pulled the coat apart as it slid to the next button.

Oh God NO!!

'POP' the second button undid. The hand slid down to number three.

Oh please dear God not THAT!!

'POP' the LAST button!

Slowly the hand pulled apart the sides of the coat and began sliding over her stomach, running its spread fingers through the soft nap of her angora sweater.

Corrine bit her bottom lip to stop herself from crying, as the fingers began tugging the sweater from the waistband of her skirt. Her warm skin recoiled from the ice cold, slightly tremulous hand, as it tunnelled its way up inside her clothing.

She held her breath as the hand stopped at her bra. Sliding to one side, the fingers brushed sensuously over the silky material that covered her left breast. In slow gentle caresses they circled the soft orb, as if searching for the spot where the secret bud lay hidden.

Then with sudden impatience, it hooked its fingers under the black lace and in one quick movement yanked bra and jumper alike, high to her neck.

Corrine gasped aloud as her breasts tumbled into view. She felt the prowler move his head nearer to hers, looking down over her shoulder at the twin mounds peeking out from beneath the rumpled sweater. Each firm breast stood out proudly in the cold air. Rushes of goose pimples erupting on the soft white flesh pulling the dark nipples into hard erect knots.

She heard him sigh as he cupped a breast in his hand and gently squeezed its tender flesh. Whilst with one stray finger reached out, to roll the hard little bud beneath its pad.

"Please don't. That's enough now, pleaseeee." she begged.

As if in response the gentle massage gave way to more violent squeezing. Corrine again bit her lip, this time to stop the pain, as he roughly pinched her nipple between two fingers.

She could hear his breathing, coming in short excited pants close to her ear. It smelt of whisky, overlaid heavily with the tang of Polo mints.

Then suddenly her head was free, its captor preferring the pleasure of her other breast relinquished its hold on her hair and joined its companion.

Corrine turned her head to the side, not wanting to witness the abuse her body was suffering. She looked wistfully at the door catch, just a few scant inches from her hand. She tried to ignore the squeezing and kneading her breasts were taking, and began calculating how fast she could shrug off his hands, open the door, and jump out before he could stop her.

If she could just catch him unaware... maybe?

A sudden thrill shot through her, as he began rolling both her nipples between his thumbs and forefingers. She closed her eyes and gritted her teeth, fighting against the sudden unwelcome warmth that began building in her crotch.

No, no, NO!!

Then suddenly the hands were gone! She opened her eyes in shock, and for one fleeting moment thought it was over, he'd had enough and was going to let her go. Then she heard that same hoarse whisper in her ear, and knew with a sinking heart that it was far from over.

"Nice tits bitch. Now let's see what you've got down here?"

She felt his hands searching for the fastening to her skirt.

"NO!!" She yelled, and throwing his hands apart, grabbed the door catch and pulled.

CLICK? CLICK? CLICK?

It was stuck! She began sobbing uncontrollably as she hurled her weight against the door. The whole car swayed with the effort but the door didn't budge.

"OPEN!! God damn you. ope...."

BUTTON!!

Too late, already his arm was snaking around her throat, dragging her back away from the door.

"Oh no you don't, you tight arsed bitch, I haven't finished with you yet!" he snarled, and began pulling harder, lifting her out of the seat and bending her over towards the back.

Corrine grabbed hold of the steering wheel with both hands, determined not to be dragged into the back of the car.

She had to get away! From the corner of her eye she could see the locking button, still down. A small, two pence worth, piece of black plastic, the Judas she'd once thought her saviour.

She was finding it hard to breathe now, if she was going to do something it had to be now. She released the wheel with her right hand and fumbled with the locking button. Immediately she felt her other hand begin to slip from the wheel. Her fingers slick with sweat kept slipping off the button as she tried to lift it.

The other hand was no better; its hold on the wheel was getting weaker all the time.

In the next second three things happened. One, the button popped up out of its hole like a jack-in-the-box. Two, Corrine's left hand lost its grip, and with a cry of triumph from the back, was dragged half way over the seat. Three, Corrine managed to snatch the wheel with her right hand and stop her slide into hell.

With a cry of frustration her assailant pulled harder. She was barely

managing to hold on to the steering wheel, her grip had slipped to the last joint of her fingers. If that slipped to....?

One chance?

With all her strength she pushed forward, his forearm cut into her throat, cutting off her air. Her hand began to tremble with the strain of maintaining her grip on the wheel.

Come on talk to me, you bastard, say SOMETHING!

"Loose the FUCKING! Wheel COW!..." he hissed.

Corrine released the wheel and flung her self-back, throwing her head in the direction of his voice.

There was a dull 'crack' as she connected. With a howl of pain the arm slackened its grip, and Corrine, although her own head also rang from the blow, snatched the door open, and was out!

With her shoe's slipping and sliding on the greasy surface she ran up the drive, trying vainly to scream for help, but with her throat bruised and sore, it came out little more than a strangled croak. When...!

Heeeeeeeeres Cocco!

Her right foot slid forward whilst her left detoured to the side, and down she went. The seam in her skirt tearing to the waist as she landed in ungainly splits. Corrine sucked in a deep breath as the muscle down the inside of her thigh screamed at her in agony. She glanced quickly over her shoulder, and what she saw banished the pain instantly. In the poor light she could just make out her assailant, now out of the car, coming towards her, FAST!

No time to stand, she tried to crawl away quickly on all fours, the tarmac tearing her tights and scuffing the skin from her knees.

"Help me someone, please!" she sobbed, "Please help MEEEEEEEE...!"

She let out one last yell as something heavy dropped on to her, knocking the breath from her body and squashing into the dirty driveway.

She was quickly rolled onto her back. With legs straggling her waist and one hand round her throat he pressed down with all his weight. Vivid gold sparks flashed on and off across her vision, as she struggled to draw air into her tortured lungs. She could barely make him out as he drew his free arm across his face where his nose would be, and looked at it in the light of the sodium lamp that shone behind him.

"You fucking bitch, I'm bleeding. If you've broke my nose I'll fucking kill you, you tight arsed cunt! Now stop fucking struggling or you'll REALLY be sorry!"

She vaguely felt her clothes being pulled up and a hand groping frantically

between her legs. Then the world seemed to... drift? Everything seemed to be enclosed in a fuzzy black frame that was slowly getting smaller. Her throat stopped trying to fight the weight that was bearing down on it. She seemed to be floating.

If this is dying it's not so bad!

The image of her daddy slid into her mind, tucking her into her little bed with Mr Fluffy tail rabbit, his smiling face leaning over her to place a kiss on her forehead.

"Nigh-nigh sweetheart, mommy, daddy love's you!"

She slowly began to close her eyes for the last time.

If I die before I wake, I pray my soul....

And suddenly the weight was gone. Cold sweet air gushed into her searing lungs. She rolled on to her side, her heart trip hammering in her chest, gasping.

As her sense's slowly returned she looked around anxiously, then recoiled in shock. He was still there! And he was...was... DANCING? In the middle of the drive half hidden by the shifting shadows, her assailant was spinning this way and that in a total frenzy.

Shaking her head to clear her blurred vision she looked again.

What she saw caused Corine's stomach to flip over and put a hand to her mouth to suppress the retch building in her chest.

He was DEFORMED! He had THREE legs!

Her skin crawled with the thought of his hands on her flesh. When suddenly a fourth leg appeared as he seemingly split in two! Then the truth dawned on her in bright exhilaration.

Looky here boys! The cavalry's arrived!

She was no longer alone someone had come to help.

Her elation quickly turned to apprehension as she noted the difference in the build of the two men. The one facing her she recognised as the big man who had approached her by the gate. His face in the light of the sodium lamp was stark and yellow, the livid scar standing out in stark relief. At about six foot two he towered over her knight in shining armour. Who with his back towards her, stood a little over five foot seven and would have made weight watchers slimmer of the month look positively rotund.

David and Goliath, only David forgot to bring his sling shot!

With an angry roar the giant launched himself at his opponent, lifting him off the ground in a rib crushing bear hug.

Too terrified to move Corinne watched as the one sided contest continued. The animal like grunting of the Goliath as he relentlessly applied more and more pressure, accompanied by the strangled cries of David, filled her ears. The malevolent triumphant sneer on the giant's face filled her eyes, forcing her to close them, squeezing out unshed tears in the process.

DO SOMETHING! Scream! Run for help! Anything! But do it NOW!!

But although her mind screamed at her, her body just sat there, too scared to move. She opened her eyes just as the giant spun her Good Samaritan around into the light, and for the first time Corinne saw the pain twisted face of her would be saviour.

It was Ray!!

Her spirits soared; He hadn't abandoned her after all. Probably only held up for some reason. Damn! If only she'd waited a little longer. But as quickly as her spirits had soared; now they sank with a sickening thud! Ray was losing!

In a few more moments Ray would be as helpless as she'd been. Her knight in white armour would be no more than a crumpled heap on the floor.

No it wasn't fair!

With sudden resolve she scrambled to her feet and jumped on to the giant's back. One hand curled round his mouth cutting off his air.

See how you like it you bastard!

The other hand went for his eyes. He managed to turn his head away at the last instant and her hand found his cheek. With all the venom she could muster she sank her fingernails deep into the flesh and dragged them across his face. A muffled howling filled the air as he released his grip on Ray and grabbed at her hands. Corrine hung on for dear life as the giant thrashed from side to side in an effort to dislodge his unwelcome piggyback rider. Abruptly the giant bent forward sending Corrine somersaulting over his head.

She crashed to the ground and immediately spun round to face her assailant.

He stood before her panting, blood pouring down his ruin cheek. He took a step forward and opened his mouth to speak, when there was a sudden 'thump' and with a momentary look of astonishment his eyes closed and he crumpled to the ground.

Behind him stood Ray, holding a large stone in two hands. He threw the stone to one side and stepping forward offered his hand, "Come on lets get out of here" he said, taking her hand and pulling her to her feet.

Corrine looked down at the giant lying at her feet, she noticed the expensive looking watch on his wrist and wondered what had happened to the poor sole he'd stole such a nice bright silver watch from "Shouldn't we call the police?"

“We will, we will. But for now let’s get out of here. I don’t know how long it’ll be before he wakes up, and I for one don’t want to be here when he does!

”She hesitated as he began leading her up the drive, “But what about my car?”

“You think you’ll be able to drive right now?”

She looked at her free hand, it was shaking badly. No she was too upset to be able to drive safely. Just then the man at her feet groaned and rolled on to his side. The movement galvanised them both in to action, and as one, they began running up the drive and out into the street. They ran for what seemed ages, finally stopping to get their breath.

“We must tell the police.” Said Corrine

“Yeah. Trouble is at this time of night the local cop shop will be shut.” Ray replied, “We’ll have to call them instead. I tell you what, my flats not far from here, we could go there. I’ll call them and we’ll be nice and safe while we wait for them. OK?”

Corrine readily agreed and the two of them set off through the streets of Cannock. Finally they reached a deserted filling station. Corrine looked around the forecourt with its concrete islands long since devoid of the petrol pumping machines and then back to Ray ”You live here?”

“Yeah. Apparently the underground tanks developed a leak and it was too expensive to replace them. So they just stripped it down and moved out. I’ve got the small flat above what used to be the shop.” He gave Corrine a weak smile and added. “It’s not very big or well looked after, but it’s cheap and I don’t have to worry about the neighbours.”

They enter by a small side door leading to a flight of stairs.

“Go on up.” Ray said as he turned to a door on his left. “The phones in the old shop. I’ll just nip in and call the police.” With that he opened the door and disappeared inside.

Corrine hesitated for a moment then slowly began to climb. The stairs obviously shared a thin partitioning wall with the shop as Rays muffled voice seeped through the plaster. Judging by the peeling paint on the stair walls Corrine wasn’t expecting a great deal from the upstairs rooms. She however was mildly surprised as she entered into the living room. It was much bigger than she’d expected. There was a two-seater sofa bed with a large floral pattern sat in the centre of the room. An electric fire stood against one wall. A fourteen-inch television rested on a chest of draws in one corner. Whilst on the far corner there was a small pine table with three chairs, two of them pushed against the wall unused. The floor was partially covered with a large rug, the pattern threadbare down to the backing in places. On the far side a curtain hung down half covering an alcove, which Corrine could see was

used as a kitchen. All in all it was better than she was expecting, giving Rays description of it. Ok, the décor leaved much to be desired but it was obvious Ray had least tried to keep it clean.

“Sit yourself down there” Ray said as entered the room “The police said they’d send a patrol car round as soon as they could. I’ll just make us a nice cup of tea whilst we wait .OK?”

Corrine smiled and nodded.

Ray returned the smile and disappeared behind the curtain.

Corrine sat on the sofa and surveyed the room. It wasn’t so bad. All it needed was a woman’s touch. A lick of paint on the walls, some new curtains at the window, maybe some bright covers for the sofa and it wouldn’t be half-bad!

Perhaps she would be that woman?

I know I’ve had a bad run of luck with the men I’ve dated over the last eighteen months. But Rays different. She thought. After all he didn’t stand me up AND he risked life and limb for me. Corrine smiled as she glanced once more around the room. *Yes a woman’s touch.*

Ray stood in the kitchen, his mind racing; He looked up at the girlie calendar on the wall, a beautiful naked blonde pouted at him from the picture. His eyes travelled down to the full breasts pushed seductively forward then further down to the dark shadow with just a hint of pink between her legs. He smiled, his eyes went once more to the rounded breasts and his smile got broader.

God he loved tits, especially big ones with dark nipple’s that stood to attention.

He reached down a pulled open the draw in the kitchen unit. He rummaged through the assorted cutlery, finally settling on a large wide bladed carving knife. Ray lifted the knife and pressed its point into the top of one of the blonde’s breasts and carefully cut a circle around it. Then withdrawing the blade he then stabbed the picture breast in the nipple, pulling it away from the paper. He slowly rotated the blade watching the paper breast turn on its point. He felt his penis harden and press against the confines of his jeans. He looked over his should at the curtain that obscured his guest.

I could go and ring the police. He said to himself. *That’s if there really was a phone down stairs.* He giggled to himself. His attention returned to the blade. He could see his reflection in its shiny surface. His face grew dark as he saw the lived blue bruise on his cheekbone and the dried blood beneath his nostrils. The sneering smile returned. It had been good in the car at first. But now in his flat with no one to hear him and no more bloody do gooders interfering. Things were going to be so much better!

Ray putting the knife behind his back turned and grabbed hold of the

curtain...

Corrine sat eagerly on the sofa, saw Rays hand pulling the curtain open.
Now was her chance to impress She sat up straight, pushing out her breasts.

Perhaps, she thought as she put on her best smile.

Perhaps my luck is about to change....!

THE END

A DEAD RINGER

**“In the eye of the beholder
Seeing is believing.”**

Anon

Doris peered cautiously at the young man standing on her doorstep. Dressed in a suit that looked two sizes to large, slicked down hair and sporting a toothy smile, he looked reminiscent of George Formby in one of those 'Forties' movies she used to watch at the local flicks.

"Good evening Madam" he said "My names Errol. I'm pleased to tell you that our computer has selected you, out of the entire south Staffs' area, as the winner of our special, once in a life time, never to be repeated, promotional offer!"

"Here, take a look at this!" he added enthusiastically holding up a piece of wood. For just an instant, Doris thought he'd pulled out a ukulele and was about to give her a rendition of 'Fan like Fanny'. But then she recognised it for what it was, a section of window frame.

"The latest, state of the art, thermoplastic, hermetically sealed, *TRIPLE!* Glazed window replacement."

"Oh... I see." Doris mumbled the fingers of one hand fluttering absently around her bottom lip. "That's very kind of you young man. Who did you say you were from?"

"The Clear Glass Revival Company, Madam", Errol beamed, his tombstone teeth shining whitely in the twilight air. "Clearly a *better* window".

"Ah..." Doris said distractedly, "my husband was a salesman"

"Really?" Errol's smile tightened "small world... Er... As I was saying these windows are..."

"Yes, good at it he was. Gift of the gab you know? Um... that is until... he..." she lowered her eye's sadly ".... Mr Morgan's no longer with us."

"Oh I'm... sorry."

"Thank you you're very kind, but it's been a long time now. You know it's funny but you look a lot like him," she shook her head in disbelief; "you're almost a dead ringer for him!"

"Really? He must have had a bike ay!" Errol sniggered. Then quickly

stopped, his laughter sticking in his throat as he caught Doris's icy stare "Ahhh... sorry" he mumbled awkwardly.

Doris's expression softened, and then asked, "Would you care to come in and have a cup of tea?"

Errol shifted uncomfortably convinced he'd blown any chance of a sale. He looked up the darkening street, he'd still got a lot more house's to call at, and a lot more 'winners' for his 'never to be repeated offer' before he could call it a day.

"That's very nice of you... but.."

"Please, do come in." Doris entreated opening the door wide, "You could tell me more about your windows. With this draughty old house I probably need them."

With the prospect of ready commission - the first in over two weeks - Errol readily agreed.

She led him into the front room. Although a good size it seemed oppressively small amid the clutter of ornaments, pictures and various potted plants, including one giant aspidistra which dominated one whole corner of the room.

"Make yourself comfortable I'll just pop the kettle on."

Errol sauntered around the room appraising its contents, he was no expert, but this stuff was certainly not junk. Picking up an ornate photo frame from the sideboard, he whistled softly to himself as he weighed it in his hands. Solid silver!

There was no getting away from it the old gal was loaded!

"That's George, my husband."

Errol jumped. He hadn't heard Doris's slipped feet behind him. Now, startled by the quiet voice at his shoulder he hastily fumbled to replace the photo, "I'm sorry I-I was only looking. I didn't mean t-to intrude" he stammered.

Doris smiled, "It's alright. Have a good look; you can see what I mean about the resemblance."

Errol peered at the face in the sepia photo and almost laughed out loud. There was no similarity at all!

But...? if it got him a sale? He didn't care if it was a picture of Donald Duck. "I see what you mean," he said, appearing suitably amazed. "We do look alike!"

Doris clutched her hands in delight as she sat on the large overstuffed chintz sofa. "I knew it!" she said with a huge smile, "These old eye's of mine

never let me down!"

"Now" she said tapping the cushion next to her, "please sit down and tell me what it is I've won".

An hour and a half later, and Errol was getting very excited, an old large house with a lot of outdated windows, and it looked increasingly like he'd talked her into changing the *LOT!*

ELEVEN and a half grand up to now and still the conservatory to go!

In his mind's eye he could see his boss's beaming face, feel his hand being pumped up and down in congratulations. But more than that, he could see the fat commission check and the resulting change in Sally's attitude it would bring. His girlfriend had been playing it very cool of late, but now...

"There is just one thing?" Doris was saying, breaking his reverie, "does your firm do other building work?"

"Er... No we specialise in windows." Errol answered warily.

"Oh that is a pity. The sewage pipe that runs through the cellar is cracked and the seepage smells awful. I was so hoping to get everything fixed in one go. Save having different people coming and going all the time."

"Still..." she said placing one finger on her lip thoughtfully, "I suppose there are *other* builders that could do both jobs."

Errol blanched, he could see his fat commission cheque sailing out the proverbial window. See the boss's smiling face becoming an angry scowl, the shaking hand becoming an accusing pointing finger, "*Must try HARDER!!*"

And worse, he could see Sally's long face and hear her whinging voice!

"We're not staying in AGAIN?!!"

"No no it's alright!!" he sputtered "I'm sure we can do the pipe as well."

He wasn't sure at all, but then... why not? The papers were full of builders. He could hire one to do the work, and who knows he might even make himself a few extra bob on the side as well.

He smiled confidently at Doris "Yes. Yes I'm absolutely positive we can."

"Good" smiled Doris rising from the seat, "I'll show you what the trouble is, so you can quote me a price. This way."

"W-what *NOW?*!" exclaimed Errol.

"Yes, why not?" she frowned slightly, "There isn't a problem is there?"

"No-no, not at all" Errol assured her as he hurriedly got to his feet and followed Doris out of the room.

At the end of the hall, under the stairs, Doris slid back a large shiny bolt

and swung open a stout oak door.

Errol staggered back, his hand automatically going to his mouth and nose as a vile stench billowed out over him.

"I know it's bad but if you could just take a quick look...."

Errol advanced to the top of a flight of stairs which disappeared down into a cloying blackness. "Is there a light?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid the switch at the top doesn't work, you'll have to use the one at the bottom."

"The *bottom*?!"

Doris smiled weakly, "I know it's silly. But that's the way they built them in those days. 'Jerry built' that's what my George used to say. Perhaps your people could fix that for me as well?"

"If you just slide your hand down the wall as you go, you can't miss it!" she assured him.

Errol hesitated; he really didn't want to go down there. The smell was thick and sticky, like a cancerous cloud.

He'd almost decided it wasn't worth it, when he remembered it was Sally's birthday next week. And if he couldn't afford to buy her a present...?

With a resigned shrug, he held his breath and reluctantly started down the stairs. Half way down he yelped in alarm, as the door above suddenly slammed shut, plunging him into total darkness.

"W-what the...? Mrs Morgan!...MRS MORGAN! Could you open the door please I can't see!"

"Huh! Oh yes you'd like that wouldn't you George." Doris hissed, "Like to get out and run off with your floozy again. Well not this time George Morgan, you'll not get out this time!"

Errol stumbled blindly up the stairs and banged frantically on the door. "Mrs Morgan please! My names Errol not George! Please open the door."

"You don't fool me George, I recognised you straight away."

"NO! I'm not George! My names Errol Tillsly I work for...."

"Don't try your smooth talk on me George. You walked out on me once, but never again. You won't get out this time," she cackled vindictively, "No! Not this time you won't."

"LET ME OUT!!" Errol screamed at the wooden door as he heard Doris's footsteps faintly moving away *"I'M NOT YOUR BLOODY HUSBAND"*

"LET ME OUT!! YOU STUPID OLD FAR...."

The hall door clicked shut. She was gone!

He kicked the door in frustration, "*DAMN!!*" He turned around reviewing the situation. There *had* to be another way out!

He slowly began descending the stairs feeling urgently along the wall for a light switch. But even as he did something tugged at his mind, something the old woman said, something that gave him a bad feeling deep in his stomach, if only he could... Suddenly his hand closed over an old fashioned domed light switch. With a sigh of relief he clicked it on.

Nothing!

He clicked it back and forth in desperation, his breath coming in urgent gasps.

Nothing, only the same putrescent darkness.

Gingerly he set out across the cellar. Only to go crashing to the floor as he tripped over, cracking his elbow on the hard concrete surface. Cursing he rubbed his injured elbow, and then blindly reached out feeling for the obstacle he'd tripped over.

His fumbling fingers roved over the soft pliant object at his feet. Then suddenly slid into something cold and wet. Grimacing in disgust he pulled his hand back and held it up to his nose.

His head shot back violently as a thick rancid odour hit him. Heaving convulsively he frantically wiped the putrid slime off against his coat. And felt the small lump of his forgotten lighter in his pocket.

He quickly removed it and snapped it on. The lighter sparked into life casting a small flickering pool of light that illuminated the floor before him. A long sack like thing lay just on the edge of the light. Reaching forward he hesitantly took hold and rolled it into view.

His shrill scream echoed around the cellar as a grinning face, green and bloated rolled into the light. A patch of skin sticking to the floor tore away from its forehead with a deep sucking noise, leaving a ragged hole from which white bone gleamed. Its eye sockets were sunken blue/black hollows. One crushed eyeball lay against the side of its nose where his finger had dislodged it. The tight skin around the mouth had pulled the split lips back exposing yellowed teeth in black gums, behind which something squishy flopped into place.

The lighter dropped from his hand as he scuffled quickly backwards, away from the hideous grinning thing before him.

And backed into another!

Errol whimpering inanely, searched frantically for the lighter.

To be in a room with dead bodies was bad enough, but to be also in the dark....."

His hand closed gratefully around the lighter, and again his world was an island of flickering light. He moved around the cellar, with thumb and forefinger clamped over his nostrils against the sickening corruption.

There were seven bodies altogether in various stages of decomposition. A couple of them had missing fingers or lumps of flesh missing from their arms and legs. He tried to dismiss the large, uniform teeth marks surrounding the injuries. Teeth marks that belonged to no animal!

The lighter was getting hotter in his hand and the flame smaller. Corpses writhed uncomfortably, even in death under its flickering shadow, and though his heart beat faster and faster with every imagined movement, he dare not shut it off.

He cried in alarm as something suddenly cracked under his foot. He held the light closer and could just make out a clipboard protruding from beneath his shoe.

Releasing his nose he bent and brushed a thick layer of dust from the piece of paper secured by the clip.

SEALEASY WALL INSULATION COMPANY.

Errols mouth felt dry and his bowels seemed on the point of giving way as horrible though occurred to him. "N-no it couldn't be..." He moved quickly to another body and was about to search through it's pockets when he saw a badge pinned to the jacket:

SOUTH STAFFS GAS BOARD.

Now he was really scared. He moved to the next.

COVERALL INSURANCE CO.

And...

A NEW WORLD: Jehovah Witnesses.

And many more. But it was the last one that crushed him:

John Creasy, **THE CLEAR GLASS REVIVAL COMPANY!!**

Strength ran from his legs like water. He crumpled onto his bottom, as the lighter slipped from his numb fingers surrendering itself to the dark. He felt dead inside, as dead as the body before him.

John Creasy? He'd known him! Everyone thought he'd run off with some woman or other. When? Two- three years ago?

Errol sat in the dark, his mind racing over everything that had happened, and all the time the old woman's words crept stealthily forward, louder, louder, washing out everything but one simple sentence.

...You won't get out this time... THIS TIME!!

THIS TIME!!

In the front room Doris could only just hear the hysterical screaming and banging coming from the cellar. She smiled to herself as she stroked the fat tabby cat sitting on her lap.

It was nice to know he hadn't escaped like the other times.

"He'll soon get tired of all that noise Tiddles, don't you worry! He can shout, as much as he likes, no one will hear him. And he won't get out this time, Tiddles. Not with the new bolt we put on. Will he?"

"And we won't be fooled by those friends of his, all dressed up like real policemen either will we Tiddles? No weeee won't!"

"Well pretend like before, that we haven't even seen him, Ay Tiddles?" she smiled down at the cat as she scratched under its chin. The cat holding its head high for her closed its eyes and purred loudly.

Doris pressed her ear to the door. It had been nearly a month now since the noises stopped. She sighed noisily, her mouth a tight line, shaking her head she looked down at Tiddles as he rubbed himself against her legs. "Looks like he got out again Tiddles, just like before. Probably gone back to that floozy!"

"You'd never run off and leave me would you Tiddles? Ay? You'd never leave me alone?" The cat as if in reply meowed softly and standing on two legs brushed its whole body up and down her leg. "There's a good cat. Come on Tiddles I'll get you some nice milk."

Doris was just pouring the milk into a saucer, when the doorbell rang. Shutting Tiddles in the kitchen, Doris shuffled up the hall in her pom-pom slippers and opened the door.

"Hello Madam. I represent the 'Good House Keeping Guild' I wonder if I could interest you in our catalogue?"

Doris looked up into the young handsome face that seemed so familiar and smiled sweetly.....

THE END.

THE HONEY POT

“An eye for an eye”

The Bible

Zack whistled softly when he saw it!

Standing next to the curb in the dimly lit side street. It looked like a gift from the gods.

A white 1994 Ford Escort X.R.S Turbo Sports!

Man oh man! Would Tony and Rab piss their pants in envy when they saw him in this little motherfucker!

A quick glance over his shoulder to check if anyone was watching. Zilch! Not really surprising in this neighbourhood. Half the houses were boarded up. The rest occupied by squatters or people dumped by the council for rent arrears. A god-awful place where the dregs of humanity finally reached rock bottom.

He knew from experience that any tenant unfortunate to live in one of these rat infested holes, would be by now huddled behind locked and bolted doors. Keeping well away from windows, lest they be seen and marked for a 'little fun' by the roaming gangs of youths, like himself, who stalked the streets at night in search of a blast!

As he walked past the car he slid his hand over its bodywork as if caressing a naked woman.

He reached the end and turned and viewed it from the rear.

Oh man! This was one slick jalopy.

What the hell was it doing here? He looked at the houses in the street. Empty the lot of them. Dark dismal edifices slowly rotting away like gangrenous flesh. Too bad even for the squatters! So apart from the inevitable glue sniffers flaming the grey stuff in some dark corner. The whole street was deserted!

Zack sneered. Probably one of them goody-goody social workers. The sort with a plum in their mouth and a bad smell under their nose.

Yeah that's it. Parked it here in hopes no one will see it, while they wonder off and do their bit for 'society' I bet! Can't have the likes of us riffraff touching their property. Oh no! Dear me they might catch something

contagious!

Pompous bastards!

He took the spike from jeans pocket, then pressing the point against the cars side walked back down to the front. Sniggering to himself as a thin white ribbon of paint spiralled into the night air. Then with a quick flick of his arm two more long slashes. Mark of Zorro.

"Zack the Man!"

Zack laughed, not a pleasant sound, containing as it did more malice than mirth.

He almost wished he could come back and watch their reaction when they found their precious company car gone.

"Man! They'll crap themselves right here on the pavement." he chuckled.

Still no time to waste. The hotshot prat's could come back anytime. And he had plans for this car. This car would make him king for the night.

He smiled again, this time with true pleasure as he thought of all the fun he would have racing Tony and Rab around the estate.

"Yeah man. In this baby there gon'er be eating my shit all-ll night."

Zack moved to the driver's door and peered at the window. No alarm sticker on show, just a small circular advert brandishing the smiling face of a butler in stiff necked shirt, with the words:

JEEVE'S VALETING SERVICE. Printed around the edge.

Zack snorted in derision. Trust the council to waste its money looking after one of their own.

He studied the dashboard. No little red warning light flashing. Good there was no alarm.

He was just about to use the spike in the door lock when he saw the lock button was up!

His mouth dropped up open in amazement, then broadened into a grin. It was open! The dozy prats walked off and left it open!

"Suckers! Will they never learn!"

Opening the door Zack jumped in. He was briefly startled by the unusually bright large courtesy lamp, mounted above the driver's seat, illuminating the interior. Not caring if he was seen, he spent several seconds appraising the interior before he closed the door and put out the light. It was very plush! Obviously customised with its thick, non-standard padding on all the doors and roof making the inside as silent as the grave. The bucket seats still with the polythene covers on hugged his hips like the cupped hands of a giant

holding water. The air held the aroma of lavender air freshener and new leather. The dashboard was a maze of dials and gauges.

The only odd thing about it was the steering wheel? Sports cars usually had small leather bound wheels, but this one had an ungainly large thick wheel that had the feel of solid iron.

Still no accounting for taste!

He looked at himself in the mirror. He liked to do that. He liked to admire his long red wavy hair and the small patch of hair on the point of his chin.

Buffalo Bill rides again!

As he brushed a strand of hair away from his cheek, the bracelet of small finger length bones bound together by leather strips, clicking idly like crickets around his wrist. He turned his head to the side to appreciate the pale blue skull tattooed on the side of his neck, and smiled.

That was cool. It let every one know not to mess with Zack the Man. That Zack the Man was one, mean dude!

He reached up to see if the 'dork' had left the keys behind the sun visor, and was amazed to find, not only, no keys, but no visor either!?

Strange! But what the hell! Not like he was going to be driving this in the daylight anyway!

The spike in his hand was a long tapering blade, the broad end had a small block of wood attached, held in place by reams of insulating tape. He transferred the spike to his other hand, and placed the point in the ignition key slot. Then using the heel of his other hand rammed the spike in as far as it would go.

Next, using both hands on the broad end twisted the spike.

The oil and ignition lights clicked on, glowing bright red like the eyes of some waking demon.

Yes! One more little twist and we're awa....!

The radio suddenly lit up, and a tinny voice emanated from the speakers.

"WARNING! WARNING!! ILLEGAL ENTRY! VACATE THIS VEHICLE IMMEDIATELY!!"

"What the fuck....?"

"IGNORING THIS WARNING OR ANY FURTHER ATTEMPT TO START THIS VEHICLE WILL HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES!"

"YOU HAVE TEN SECONDS TO LEAVE:"

"ONE. TWO. THREE.... "

Zack couldn't believe it! He'd come across alarm systems before, but

nothing like this. He sniggered.

"FOUR. FIVE..."

His smile withered. Who the fuck do they think their dealing with?

"SIX. SEVEN..."

Zack wrenched out the spike and using the butt smashed the front of the radio.

"EIGHT. NINE..."

Zack hit it again and again, pieces of broken glass tinkling as it cascaded over the console.

"TE----- "

The radio died in a blue flash as the spike's handle finally found its mark.

In a mad frenzy Zack continued to beat the dead radio, reducing it to a tangled mess of wires.

"Nobody! NOBODY! Fucks with the Man!" he screamed. Then, anger spent, lent back in the seat and pulled the edges of his denim waistcoat straight in satisfaction. He lifted the small round badge with the words 'I AM 2' on it, pinned to the waistcoat, and after breathing on it polished it with his knuckles, sneering cockily.

That'll show 'em! They can't frighten him! Or order him about!

He was Zack the Man! A real mean dude!

He might just torch it when he'd finished with it. Teach the bastards a lesson. He chuckled, Yeah he'd like that, watching their pretty little car go up in flames.

Still chuckling to himself he jammed the spike back in the ignition and twisted it hard.

Zack screamed as the heavy steering wheel dropped in his lap. Pinned in the chair, Zack struggled to lift it up.

It wouldn't budge an inch!

"Jesus Christ!" he swore under his breath, "The fucking thing must weigh a ton!

"No, not a ton! You ill informed cretin! Merely a hydraulic clamp!"

Zack stared in amazement at the speakers the voice had come from. "W-what?"

"A little invention of mine. A hydraulic clamp. Capable of producing a force in excess of three tons!"

Zack sat bemused, He couldn't believe it! He was trapped! The steering

wheel was making it impossible for him to move.

A fucking booby trap!

And the smug prat who'd set it, was even now talking to him in that infuriating calm voice of his, like he was talking to some kid!

"You really should have heeded the warning. It was quite clear! Only the most determined and truly stupid pig headed would have stayed there!"

Stupid? Pig headed? Zack fumed. He was the Man! Nobody called him stupid!

"You wait till I get out'a here, fuck head! I'll show you who's stupid. I'm gon'er kick your balls so high up your arse..."

A laugh, heavy with derision, "What makes you think you're going to get out?"

"I'll get out!" Zack yelled back as he began thrashing his body from side to side in a desperate effort to wriggle free. But the wheel was pressing down too hard to allow him to ride his hips over the sides of the seat.

After a few more minutes of frantic struggling, Zack finally gave up, and breathing hard rested his head on the headrest, totally spent.

"See?"

"Alright so you got me. What now? The cops? Well go ahead call 'em! They can't hold me. I'll be out walking before morning."

"No I won't call the police. Unfortunately they wouldn't approve of my little trap."

"Fucking A-right they won't!" Zack began to smirk, "I reckon I might make a complaint about you! Police don't like vigilantes." he laughed, "In fact I reckon you've got more chance of spending a night in the cells than I have."

"Yes in this day and age you're probably right." the voice agreed, "Society seems more concerned with the welfare of the offenders than they are of the victims. That's why I'm not calling the police."

"Then get this fucking wheel of me and let me go!"

"Oh I can't do that! Oh no no no!"

Zack's patience was wearing thin and the steering wheel was hurting his legs, "Well if you're not calling the police and you're not letting me go what are you going to do?" he hissed.

"I'm going to tell you a story!"

"WHAT!?"

"It's a story about a young girl named Joan. A nice girl a credit to her

family. A girl who's only aim in life was to help others.."

"Ah come on fuck brain! You ain't got me here just to listen to this bleeding heart crap 'ave you?" Zack asked in exasperation.

But the voice continued as if it hadn't heard him. The metallic sound of the voice grating on Zacks already tetchy nerves.

"A girl who stayed in most nights studying, saving her money for a little car that would help her get to and from college safely at night. That's all she ever wanted from life was a little car and to be able to help others."

"OK O.K I get the picture. A tight arse little virgin, who thinks she's Mother Teresa got hots for a car,."

The car shook with the vibration as the voice bellowed through the loudspeakers. "WE'RE TALKING ABOUT *MY DAUGHTER!*"

Zack grimaced. The noise had nearly split his eardrums.

After a few seconds the voice continued. Zack could almost feel the person on the other end struggling to keep their composure, and deciding it was better to let the prat get it out of his system, settled back in the seat.

"So one day she comes rushing in, all smiles. You should have seen her smile; it could light up a room.

'I've got it Daddy!' she says. Then grabbing my arm drags me out to see it. An old mini, with more rust on it than paint, but she loved it. She was so happy. She insisted on showing me every switch, every light. You should have heard her laugh when she pressed the horn. I told her it sounded like a strangled duck, and she laughed even more.

It was the first time she'd really laughed since her Mother died three years before, and I thanked God for it!"

There was a pause and Zack began to wonder if the man had gone but then he started up again, his voice cracking with emotion.

"Then one night a couple of months ago she was off on her way to college. I remember it well, she came and kissed me 'bye' like she always did. Telling me she'd be back at the usual time with some fish and chips for our supper. Then off she went."

"I never saw her alive again!"

"While I was busy laying plates and knives and forks for our supper. My Joanie was burning to death in the mangled remains of her beloved mini!"

"And do you know how it happened? Do you know why?"

Zack had an uneasy feeling he knew what was coming.

"Rammed by Joyriders!! Degenerates like you who think it's clever and

'cool' to steal someone's car and drive it around like a mad thing. Not caring who they hurt, just so long as they have their fun!"

"Hey man! You got it wrong, I ain't like that!" Zack protested, "I never hurt nobody!"

"I was just looking that's all. I wasn't gonna take it 'onest!"

"Honest? You don't know the meaning of the word! Look above the driving mirror. See it?"

Zack did as he was told, and sure enough there was something there. A small round glass eye like the spy holes they put in doors.

"Another one of my innovations. A miniature T.V. camera. I've been watching you ever since you got in the car, and thanks to some files obtained from a sympathetic cop, I know who you are and what you are."

Zack heard the rustling of papers, then the voice returned with an even timber, obviously reading from the purloined files.

"Timothy Jones, commonly referred to as 'Zack'. 19 years old.

Parents: Albert and Nancy Jones. Of 31 Tyndale Road, Tyseley. B,ham.

Ran away from home 6 years ago, present address various squats in and around Dunhill road, Sparkhill, B,ham.

Previous record for aggravated burglary. G.B.H. Mugging. Possession of drugs. Supplying of drugs to minors. Car theft, and more recently taking and driving without either, permission, licence or insurance, vehicles in a dangerous manner most likely to cause an accident!"

"Not a pretty picture is it Timothy?"

Zack winced at the hated name. "FUCK YOU!" He yelled and spat a wad of green phlegm at the camera, missing only by an inch.

"Ah! Now we're seeing the real Timothy! An uncouth piece of dogshit!"

Tell me dogshit, how come society allows a piece of trash like you to continue to walk around, whilst my Joanie lies in a premature coffin?"

"Look I didn't kill your bleeding daughter. So why 'er you picking on me!?"

"Oh I know it wasn't you! You see I know the person responsible. My sympathetic policeman told me who was responsible. Another degenerate like you. He goes by the name of Rab. Do you know him?"

"Narr. Never 'eard of 'im!"

"Another piece of Dogshit walking around without even a scratch on him. And you know why? Because he's only sixteen. Too young to stand trial! So you know what they gave him?"

Zack did know. Rab had bragged about it often enough, but he was not about to admit to it!

"Banned him from driving for five years, As if that would deter him! And 18 months community service!

My daughters life gone! All those precious years ripped away from her. And he gets a smack on the wrist and told to clean up someone's garden and that's it! Debt paid to society!"

"O.K it's tough! But like I say man, it weren't me! So let me go. I've listened to your story, so come on get this fucking thing off me!"

"No it wasn't you, but it could have been! And if nothings done to stop you, some other Mother or Father will be grieving the death of their child before much longer. That's why I haven't finished with you yet. But before we carry on? Just a few precautions first..."

Zack jumped as all the lock buttons suddenly dropped into the locked position, and all the windows, silently blanked out. It was like being in space, no sound, no light. All the windows, becoming black mirrors, each with its own reflection of the captive inside, illuminated by the courtesy lamp that glowed dully in the thick darkness.

Zack suddenly became very alarmed, "Hey Man! W-what happened to the windows?" he asked, hating the nervous ring in his voice.

"Another modification. I had all the glass replaced with liquid crystal. The type used in digital watches. A small electric current and hey presto! It turns completely opaque."

"Now we won't be disturbed. I'm sure you've already noticed the soundproofing. Well now we're invisible as well!"

Zack tried desperately once more to struggle out of the pinning wheel, "Hey look man, there's no need for all this! I've learned my lesson. I won't steal anymore cars. 'onest!!"

"It's too late for that I'm afraid! You had your chance when you first got in. Now you're going to suffer like my baby suffered!"

"What yer mean? Suffer! Don't you try no funny stuff with...Aghhhhh!" A soft whirring marked an increase in the pressure in his groin as the wheel moved inexorably downward.

"Aghhh..... No!" Zack forced his fingers under the rim trying to hold back some of the weight, only to succeed in trapping them as well!

"Painful is it?" said the mocking voice, instantly becoming vindictive, "GOOD! Now you know how my Joanie felt! 'Sever fractures of the pelvic area' the autopsy said, just like this!"

Whirring.

Zacks knuckles pressed into his thighs, the ends of his fingers feeling like over inflated balloons, throbbing with scalding blood. Yelling with exertion he channelled all his strength in one last attempt at lifting the crushing weight. All to no avail. The wheel smashed all the way down. Even above his own scream Zack clearly heard the bones in his legs crack and break. Their sharp ends forced sideways, piecing the fleshy muscles of the upper thighs with a wet ripping sound.

"OH MY LEGS! MY LEGS!!" Tears coursed down his cheeks as he cried in pain and realisation that he was crippled. "Oh my legs Man! My f-f-fuck-ing le-gs" he wailed amid shuddering sobs.

Zack the Man. The real cool dude. Would never walk again!

"Yes I dare say My Joanie cried as well, though not for long. The car caught fire! They know she was alive at the time because there was smoke in her lungs. I just pray to God she was unconscious! My poor Joanie, my poor sweet Joanie" The voice finally cracked, its sobs mirroring Zack's own.

There was a cough and a sniff, then the voice was back to its strong vengeful tone. "So now it's *YOUR* turn!"

The car started up. Zack screamed as the shuddering shook the loose bones in his legs. The engine continued to rise until it was ticking over at a fast idling speed.

In the midst of his pain Zack wondered what was next. He didn't have long to wait!

The courtesy lamp changed colour from white to orange.

Zack felt heat building against his face and realised in horror just what kind of lamp it was. The type used in bathrooms instead of lights. Heater lamps!

He tried to lean away from the scorching light, giving little yelps of pain as the movement screwed his legs a bit further up the pain barrier. It was no good! His hands were still trapped and any attempt to free them brought intolerable agony.

The heat was intense now and Zack could feel the skin on his face tightening, shrinking. Gold flashes dance before him as his eyelids shrivelled open, exposing the delicate fabric of his eyes to the searing heat. Then all was black!

The skin began to blister, burst, and then blister again. His whole face seemingly boiling like hot wax.

Zack was beyond caring anymore. He was blind and crippled. All he wanted was to be free of the pain that filled him. A pain so bad, that couldn't possibly get any worse.

And then it did!

Suddenly the heat was gone. Now only a soft buzz filled the air. But a buzz that went right through him. A cold buzz that lit a raging inferno in his insides. Zack's brain felt like it was growing, expanding in the confines of his skull, pushing against the inside straining to be free.

The last thing Zack felt before he died was a rapid rumbling in his eyes as the microwaves agitated the fluid to boiling point. He was long gone when his brain exploded, the scalding grey matter pushing cooked eyes onto frazzled cheeks, gushing through his nose and out through his ears.

Zack the Man was gone!

If he'd had a spirit he might have seen the car revert to normal. Seen the dark figure open the door. Push the lifeless body aside to take the driving seat and slowly drive away.

If he'd had a spirit he may have found a girl waiting for him, a girl holding fish and chips. A girl with a vengeful smile on her lips. A smile that could light up a room.

If he had a spirit?

Rab kicked a can out of the gutter in frustration and watched as it bounced hollowly down the deserted street. Where was everybody? Christ it was no fun anymore! Over the last few weeks more and more of his mates had seemed to drop out of the scene. He hadn't had a decent race for over a week now. Not since he'd beaten Zack. Now even he seemed to have gone off somewhere.

He sighed and thrusting his hands deep in his pockets trudged up the road. Perhaps they've all gone the arcade? He thought with sudden hope, Yeah that's where they'll be!

He quickened his step, surer by the second that's where they were all hiding.

He turned the corner and stopped. There it was!

He sidled up to it, eyes wide in admiration. What a way to get the others back interested in the races. He ran a finger down the deep scratches in the paintwork and grinned. Zacks trademark alright. He tried the handle and to his surprise the door swung open wafting out the aroma of lavender polish and airfresher. Rab snorted in derision as he jumped behind the wheel.

"Suckers! Will they never learn!"

THE END.

LETTING GO

“...Now there's only love in the dark...”

Bonnie Tyler (Total eclipse of the heart)

With a heavy heart George stood outside the computer room door peering through his own sad reflection, whilst inside his long time companion was roughly dismantled piece by piece.

His sadness quickly boiled into anger as incredulously laughter seeped through the door from the two young technicians inside.

"Hey Pete get a load of this! These things must give out enough heat to fry eggs on." Said Dave, a pimply bean stalk fresh out of collage, as he exposed its archaic mechanism of valves and wires.

"Yea," chuckled Pete, "the National grid must have started up an extra generator every time they switched on!"

"Hey instead of scrapping it, perhaps we can flog it to Mac Donald's for a hot plate?" Dave scoffed.

Both men's laughter was cut short as a thin, white haired old man with a bright red strawberry birthmark covering almost the entire one side of his face, burst through the door.

"Don't you talk about my Elsie like that." snapped George, "you hear? She deserves more respect than that."

Pete and Dave, their smiles frozen, looked at each other pensively.

"Er.... Look I don't know who you are Pop?" said Pete pointing his screwdriver at George, "But this is a restricted area...."

"Don't you 'Pop' me! You young whippersnapper.!" George growled, storming forward and snatching the screwdriver away. "I was here long before you were ever bor...."

"Mr Thomas!"

George spun round and found Mr Allknot the Banks Manager, standing stiffly in the doorway.

"Can I have a word with you? Outside!"

George glared back into the ashen face of the young technician who flinched away as George thrust the spade like point of the screwdriver under the young mans nose. "Don't make anymore fun of my Elsie, you hear?"

"Y-yes s-s-sir"

George threw a questioning glance at Dave, who immediately held up his hands in surrender at the loaded screwdriver. "Hmph! You'd better!" George hissed, then stuffing the screwdriver in Pete's top pocket, turned and stalked out of the room.

His anger spent, George stood in the corridor, head bent, facing Mr Allknot.

"MR! Thomas" Allknot began, his voice trembling with rage. "I'm aware I said you'd be welcome back to visit after your retirement, But I really....."

George's head bowed even further. He suddenly looked very old and fragile, like a piece of ancient parchment.

Allknot sighed allowing the stiffness to leave his voice. He put a hand on the old mans shoulder, "Look... George. I know it's hard but I really can't allow you to disrupt the installation of the new computer like this!"

"I know I know, I'm sorry Mr Allknot," George lifted his moist brown eyes, "But me and Elsie go back a long way. Twenty years I've worked with her, maintaining her polishing her. In some ways she was the best friend I ever had. And you know Mr Allknot, in all that time she never once let Bank down. Not once!" "Then these smart arsed kids come along deriding her like that. Well it just 'ain't right, Mr Allknott, it just 'ain't right!"

Embarrassed by the unshed tears brimming in the old mans eyes, Allknot turned and looked through the window at the old machine. "Twenty years huh?" He smiled shaking his head in disbelief, "That's a hell of a long time for a computer. Now-a-days a machine's obsolete six months after you by it."

"Not my Elsie! She's one of a kind. The most advanced computer ever built," George said, smiling with unashamed pride. "Mind you!" He added with an air of caution, "not every one could work her. She could be very awkward with people she didn't like." His smile widened, "That's why I was employed to do the work." "Me and Elsie got on real well!"

"Yes" said Allknot nodding solemnly. He turned back to face the old man "and that's part of the problem George. Your retirement has made the change even more urgent."

George clutched the man's arm intensely, "But I don't have to retire? I can work on! Just Elsie and me. You don't even have to pay me! I'd be happy to....."

"Sorry George no can do!" Allknot interrupted firmly. "The new machine is a million times faster and has an almost limitless memory. I'm afraid the old E.L.C just can't compete any more! Besides you've earned the rest!"

"Rest!!" George spat the word. "Sitting alone in the flat every day. No family or friends. Is that what I've earned?"

Without waiting for an answer George turned and shuffled ruefully down the corridor and out of the Bank.

Allknot felt sorry for the old man. It was true the old man had no friends and was all alone. The birthmark that blighted his face had also blighted his life. Women had never been attracted to him and even the men tended to feel uneasy in his company, frightened to look him in the face in case it looked like they were staring at it. So as a consequence people felt easier if they just ignored him. The mark, though no fault of his own, had made him a social pariah.

The Allied & Northern Bank had been his whole life. Coming straight from school he'd proved to be one of life's plodders, able enough, but with no real spark. No real interest.

Until that is, the day the Bank invested in one of the very first computers. And preferring one of their own to operate it, offered to train any employee interested.

Whilst others threw up the hands in horror at the intrusion of science into their stuffy world of noisy adding machines and mammoth ledgers, George embraced it like a long lost child. His normal easygoing attitude blossomed overnight into the fiery passion of a religious zealot. But as he became more and more involved with binary codes, so his private life as little as it was, dwindled to nothing.

A curt, "Good morning" was all anyone came to expect, before he immersed himself in the technical manuals of the E.L.C (electronic logic computer.) Elsie!.

Allknot recalled the countless nights George had stayed over in his own time just to polish its surfaces till they shone, or repair even the minutest defect. And all the time he'd be talking to it, telling it about things he'd seen or done. Once he actually saw him just standing by it, slowly stroking the console and humming softly like a mother with her baby. No one else was allowed near. Time and time again, George had dragged himself into work, thick with a cold or flu, just to prevent anyone else touching his beloved machine. And now it was gone!

George sat inside Allknotts office facing the portly middle aged man with thinning hair, wondering why he'd been sent for.

Two weeks ago during their encounter outside the computer room Allknot had been cool and authoritative. But now the man sitting opposite with heavy sleepless eyes, was looking very strained and far from cool.

"Well how are you keeping?" asked Allknott leaning back in his chair.

George watched Allknotts tight smile, "Fine, fine. Is that why you asked me to come! To inquire about my heath"?!

Allknotts smile crumpled. "Er... Not exactly.."

Dropping his gaze he began rubbing his hands nervously along the top of his thighs. "It's the new computer..... It's.. er.... Not working properly!"

George frowned, "Well I can't help you! You need one of those whiz kids that are into microchips and such. I'm strictly a valve and coil man."

Allknot squirmed uncomfortably in his seat, "I... We've tried that, and they can't help. They say there's nothing wrong electronically. And frankly they're equally at a loss as to what's happening!"

George lent forward, intrigued, "And just what is happening?"

"It won't except the new programme! Or work at its proper speed. It just.... Wont!! And there's something else..." Allknot bit his lip as if unsure whether to continue, then, ".... It gets... Hot!"

"Hot?!" George laughed, "Well there's your problem. Even I know you have to keep these fancy machines cool. No wonder...."

"I know we have to keep it cool! God dammit!!" Allknot snapped, "We've got it hooked up to a £2500 air conditioning unit. But it still, GETS HOT!"

George stared open mouthed at the uncharacteristic outburst.

"Look" Allknot said forcing himself to be calm, "The board paid £2,000, 000 for that computer system on my recommendation. It's supposed to correlate the data from all our branches world wide, but the damn thing won't work! We're having to do all the work by hand, and it's piling up fast. I...I'm at my wits end. Could you just take a look? Please!"

George hardly recognised the room. Gone were the huge memory banks that covered all the walls from floor to ceiling. Gone was the giant computer console with its array of switches and lights that he had so lovingly tended for so many years. Now all that occupied the freshly painted room was two refrigerator-sized cubicles and a small computer console fitted with a keyboard and monitor. And sitting next to it, in a leather swivel chair, a

young brunette in a white coat. Seeing them enter the girl got up and strode quickly to greet them.

“George this is Jane Freeman, the bank's new computer operator. Jane this is your predecessor George Thomas”

Jane smiled sweetly and offered her hand “Pleased to meet you. I’ve heard a lot about you. You’re something of a legend here, the way you kept that old machine going for so long”

George smiled and took her hand, it was soft and perfectly manicured with bright pink nail varnish. She had a pretty, slightly round face with deep brown eye and lips that matched her nail varnish. Her hair was pulled back into a pony tail and she smelt like candyfloss. “Thank you” He shook her hand gently, then nodding towards the computer added. “They sure make them small these days.”

“Even less than you think.” Jane said releasing his hand, “Half of what you see is just the cooling system!”

“Well” interrupted Allknot turning to Jane “Is it behaving any better? He asked hopefully.

Jane pursed her lips and shook her head. “No I’m afraid not! It still won’t accept anything I type into it!”

Allknot sighed deeply “Well, hopefully our Mr Thomas can help?”
The three of them walked back towards the computer.

As George approached the console he felt the heat emanating from it, and more, he smelt it.

Breathing deeply, he closed his eyes, relishing in the smell of hot wire and warm shellac. He recognised it for what it was.

HOME!!

His heart began to race as a vague suspicion grew in his mind. It couldn't be could it? He moved closer, cocking his ear to listen. If he was right...
There!

Tick-a-tick tick, tick-a-tick ticks, tick-a-tick tick....

A soft sound deep inside the machine. George's mouth suddenly felt very dry.

“What is it George? Found something?” Allknot asked anxiously.

“I...I'm not sure but...” Not daring to believe, but wanting to, needing to. George placed his hand on the keyboard.

Immediately a deep humming filled the room and the ticking noise became louder more insistent. Eager!

TICK-A-TICK TICK, TICK-A-TICK TICK, TICK-A-TICK...

Allknot stood behind him as George, hesitated for a moment, then with sudden resolve, typed out a message, and watched dumbfounded as the words appeared on the monitor.

ELSIE?

George heard Jane's sharp intake of breath at the immediate response on the screen.

HELLO GEORGE. WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU!

"Oh my God!" Allknot backed slowly away, his hand clasped over his mouth in disbelief.

George, completely unfazed shook his head and smiled, "I knew it. I never could reach that loose bracket could I?" He typed again.

SORRY OLD GIRL. I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE HERE!

Response: WHERE ELSE WOULD I BE? GEORGE

George moved to answer then suddenly stopped. With his hand hovering just over the keys, he lifted his eyes to the ceiling, "Can you hear me Elsie?" he asked softly.

YES, I CAN HEAR YOU QUITE CLEARLY GEORGE.

"Good!" he said smiling, "my old fingers are not as nimble as they used to be." he dragged over the swivel chair and dropped his weight into it with a contented sigh.

"So, how are you Elsie?"

I'M ALRIGHT NOW YOU'RE HERE GEORGE...

Allknot stared dumbfounded as George continued to chat to the computer like he was talking to a person. He grabbed the arm of the young technician and pulled her to the back of the room. "What the hell is going on?"

Jane gave held out her hands, gave a dismissive shrug of the shoulders and replied "I don't know... But it seems to be a ghost of the old machine!"

"WHAT!..

George looked over his shoulder at sudden outburst from the manager.

Allknot pulled Jane even further into the corner then turned his back on George, shielding him from their conversation.

Trying to keep his voice down he hissed at Jane through clenched teeth.

"What do you mean? A ghost! For Christ sake it can't be a ghost! It's only a bloody machine!"

Jane sighed “I know, I know! But...What else could it be?”

Allknot stared down at his feet deep in thought, his puzzled frown deepening. Suddenly his face lit up. “I know!” he said squeezing Jane’s arm. “He fixed it! He must have snuck in somehow when no one was around and reprogrammed it. Yes that’s it! The old fool did this to get back at me for making him redundant!” a look of relief flooded over his face. “Well” he said, straitening himself up to his full height, “We’ll soon put an end to his shenanigans!” He was just about to turn an march back towards George when..

“And the heat?” Jane asked.

“W-what?”

“The heat! Where’s the heat coming from? I mean maybe; just maybe he did sneak in and reprogram the machine, although I seriously doubt it! Where’s the heat coming from? Unless he somehow managed to hide a 3-kilowatt heater in that small enclosure, in such away the technicians working on didn’t see it, which quite frankly is impossible! How is it throwing out so much heat?”

Allknot hesitated for a moment, then turned to look at the small console George was still talking to. She was right it was impossible! “So” he asked “How? I mean how can a machine be a ghost?”

Jane cupped her chin in her hand and gently stroked her cheek with her fingers, her eyes darting from side to side, deep in thought. Then, talking more to herself than Allknot said. “I think maybe...” she paused as if rerunning the idea through her head. Finally, settled in her mind, she turned to face Allknot.

“This old computer you had. The E.L.C or Elsie as George likes to call it. This was not your standard computer. I remember reading about this in collage. Most people think that E.L.C stands for Electronic Logic Computer, but in fact the correct term is ENGRAMIC logic Computer!

Allknot shook his head in bafflement, “And the difference is?”

“All modern day computers work the same, on the simple yes / no principle, which means it laboriously goes through every possible answer before deciding on the right one. The engramatic computer doesn’t do that. It works in the same way as our minds do. It takes ‘short cuts’ using quantum jumps in the calculation process.”

Jane hesitated at the blank look on Allknots face. She gave a quick smile and added. "Look! Take a chess game. On the basis of being just ten moves ahead against any possible defence, this would entail millions and millions of possible answers and a normal computer would calculate every single one before deciding on its answer. Even at computer speed that would take a long time. But the human mind doesn't do that. A simple glance at the board and it would discount majority of those movers automatically as being pointless! And would therefore be taking a 'short cut' to the answer and beating the computer. That's how come it's taken them years to develop a machine that can beat a human mind."

"And that's how our old machine used to work?" queried Allknot

"Yes, that's why you managed to keep it for so long. Normally the old valve system can't compete with transistors, but the ELC was different."

Allknot frowned. "But if it's such a good system why aren't all computers built like that?" He asked.

Jane snorted, "Because we can't! There has only ever been one person who ever perfected the process, a real oddball, an eccentric genius who was year's head of her time. The maker of your machine. Judith Kranz."

"A WOMAN?" Allknot spluttered.

Jane bristled, "Yes a woman! We are born with brains you know. Just because it's a machine doesn't mean it has to be made by a man!"

"Yes yes of course. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cause offence. Please continue."

Jane sniffed, a little mollified by the apology, "Well as I was saying, Judith somehow managed to programme it with her own engrams. That's thought process" she added, seeing the puzzled look return to Allknots face. "This is what allowed the machine to make those quantum jumps in logic.

Other people tried to emulate what she had done, but couldn't. Their attempts always resulted in malfunctions or incorrect data, making them totally unreliable. Of course they could have got hold of one of her machines and back engineered it to find out. But it was immensely complex and they struggled for years. Then with the advent of miniature microprocessors, it became unnecessary. They were so fast that even taking the long way around they could beat her machines. So all work on the process stopped.

Your machine was probably the last of its kind." Jane peered at him sideways "I don't know what you did with the old machine, but you do realise, that now that Judith is dead, it's a one of a kind and to a collector

it would have been worth a lot of money! Maybe even more than you paid for the new one!”

Allknots heart sank as he remembered the way the two technicians had carelessly disconnected it, then sank even lower as he pictured it on the back of the lorry trundling off to the scrap yard.

Great! Not only do I buy a machine that doesn't work! I throw a way a collectors piece that's worth a small fortune! Shit! I must get this machine working quickly before Head office finds out!

“Ok! Ok, this is all very interesting but what's this got to do with all this” he said pointing over his shoulder at George still merrily chatting away seemingly to himself.

“I was just getting to that” Jane said “We don't know exactly how Judith's machine worked, but we do know that instead of the normal connecting wires. She used an amplitude modulating carrier wave to carry pieces of data instead” Again the puzzled look from Allknot “That's radio waves” she added “But a very tight beams, extremely thin! Then they were fired into a spherical chamber. Its internal walls were studded with thousands of crystals, each one polished with hundreds of facets. These caused the beam to bounce around the inside of the sphere, criss-crossing thousands maybe even millions of times a second. And every time two pieces of data collided a detector on the outside would register it. The beauty of the thing was that the beams passed through each other and could therefore interact with another beam as well. Meaning that it was calculating not just one sum, but thousands all at the same time. And with no resistance to overcome, it made it almost instantaneous. But that was just simple mechanics. The really clever part was the distribution of those crystals. Judith Kranz somehow managed to place them in just the right place so that the matrix of beams mimicked her brain engrams. The machine basically thought like her!”

Allknot sighed, “That still doesn't expla...”

“I know, I know! Just bear with me a second longer. We know that a working brain gives off an electrical field. It's how you can tell if someone is definitely dead, we can check their brain activity by means of measuring this field.

Now we're all individuals with different eyes, noses excetra. It's reasonable to assume our brain activity is different. That everyone has an individual frequency. And it's also reasonable that should two people who share or have similar frequencies. That there should be some kind of empathy between them some kind of bond that allows them to guess the other peoples thoughts or feelings.

Take identical twins for instance, they've been able to sense when the others in trouble, even over huge distances.

Perhaps, when we're out looking for a life time mate, maybe the one we're looking for is not the most handsome or cleverest or even the same sex! Perhaps it's someone with the same brain frequency, someone to bond with, empathise with, a partner, a lover. Thee one!"

Jane took a deep breath "Now if! And I admit I'm reaching here. If by a billion to one chance, the frequency of George's brain was the same or very similar to the frequency of the carrier wave in the E.L.C...?"

Again the astonished look returned to Allknots face "You're not trying to tell me George has bonded mental with that thing? That's utterly ridiculous! It's a machine for Christ Sake!"

"A machine with a female mind," she corrected him, "Judith's mind. Not her memories of course or anywhere near her intellect, but her mind never the less!"

"But it's still a machine how can it be a ghost? It hasn't got a soul!" Allknot insisted.

"True it shouldn't have." Jane conceded, "But if as I suspect they are sharing the, same brain frequency, they could very well have bonded. Like any couple who finally find thee one for them. They've become friends, partners...Soul mates! And given the time they were together. How long did tell me earlier, Twenty years was it?"

Allknot nodded. "Twenty years of operating, maintaining and repairing it." Allknot smiled ruefully "Hmmm...Sometimes he'd just stand there gently polishing the console like he was combing the hair of a child"

"Or caressing a beloved woman?" Jane added.with raised questioning eyebrows.

Allknot opened his mouth to speak, hesitated, and then shut it again.

"Think about it! " Jane continued "Remember how you told me how when ever George couldn't come in, how the machine never worked properly for anyone else, yet always performed perfectly when George was there. And think about the times George would come in, even if it was his day off just to polish the E.L.C. You see after being together so long. A real affinity grew between them, so much so, that they needed to be together.

I believe George loves that machine, or should I say Judith Kranz!"

"Judith Kranz?" exclaimed Allknot.

"Yes. I believe it's the spirit of Judith in that machine. Not all of her you understand. The matrix is to crude to hold all that was Judith Kranz. Just the part that.... Needed!"

"You see there aren't many women in the world of science, and Judith became a role model for me. So I went out of my way to find out about her.

One day I came across an old photo of her receiving one of the many awards she'd won in her life. And although Judith was a brilliant scientist with a beautiful mind, her body was just the opposite. A portly woman with bright orange hair, she had a large hooknose, her skin was a mass of freckles and one side of her face sagged slightly, the result of a mild stroke she suffered in her early years.

She lived alone, any man was either put off by her appearance or intimidated by her intellect," Jane swallowed hard as her eyes brimmed with tears. "She died like she lived, a lonely old spinster alone in her flat. It was two weeks before anyone bothered to check up on her. They found her dead slumped over a table. On the table in front of her were..." Now the unshed tears in Jane's eyes burst forth and flowed freely down her cheeks as she continued. " 'Sniff'there were... were letters from dating agencies, apologising for not being able to find any candidates for her. One of them even offered her a discount as they hadn't been able to find her any candidates in the two years she'd been with them." She gave Allknot a withering stare. "Can you believe that? Two years! A brilliant, talented woman with a world of acclaims at her feet and yet all she really, really ever wanted was some one to share it with! "Jane's tears stopped as anger took over, "And she died of a broken heart because she was denied that one basic need, and why? Because you stupid, STUIPID men! All you! Really care about is a pretty face or a big pair of tits!"

Allknot placed his hand on her shoulder opened his mouth to voice some kind of defence or reason or apology for his sex. Couldn't find the words he needed, so settled for a weak sympathetic smile and a small reassuring shake of her shoulder. Allknot took a handkerchief from his top pocket and offered it to Jane.

Jane wiped the tears from her cheeks leaving small trails where her make-up had washed away. She took a deep breath of composure and standing a bit more erect said, "I'm sorry about that. It's just.... Well it just seems so unfair!"

Allknot responded with another reassuring shake of her shoulder.

"Any way as I was saying, some time in the last twenty years the matrix inside the computer formed its own rudimentary spirit, fuelled by the empathy and real affection George lavished on it. And I believe Judith's spirit, where ever it had been, sensed the child like intelligence of her own creation and in need of the love she'd always craved, melded with it."

Allknot turned to look at George. "And that's who he's talking to? Judith Kranzes spirit?"

"Well more like a hybrid of the two" corrected Jane, "Judith's spirit and the limited knowledge and vocabulary of the machines spirit."

Allknot continued to watch as George rose out of the chair and carefully dusted the machine it with his handkerchief. He slowly turned back to Jane a puzzled frown across his forehead.

“That still doesn’t explain the heat? Where’s that coming from? Or what it’s doing here? And why?”

“It’s the machine. Ever since it was switched on, born if you like, this is all it’s ever known, the heat of the valves, the smell of hot wire, even the sound of that loose bracket chattering away. To it, this is home!”

“But the machine can’t generate heat. Not like this!” Allknot said gesticulating to the room.”

“No, but maybe their joint spirit can! Maybe what ever drives the Judith part of their spirit is powering the heat. Or maybe there is no heat! Maybe we’re only picking up the impression of heat Judith’s creating in order to make the machine spirit, and George feel comfortable?”

“You mean that thing over there!” said Allknot pointing to the air conditioner the other side of the room is....”

“Working perfectly?” Jane finished for him with a slight smile. “Yes that machine you’ve got set to maximum, is probably freezing our butts off. But Judith’s spirit is making us experience it as heat.”

“But what’s the point? He said holding out his hands in bafflement.

“Exchange!” Jane said. “The real spirit of Judith provides a home for the mechanical part of their spirit. And the mechanical part of their spirit interacts with your computer to allow her to communicate. And the reason it came back? The answers sitting there” she pointed to George.”The third part of the trinity.”

“Ok. Let’s say I believe all this.” He said with an exasperated sigh. “What can we do about it? I have to get this machine working properly or my necks on the chopping block!”

“You could try talking to it?” she answered with a shrug of the shoulders.

“You want me to talk to a machine!?”

“Or George, or even Judith’s spirit. The way all three are intertwined, it’s more or less the same thing.” She added.

Allknot stared at Jane for a few moments, turned to look at George who’d resumed his seat and was again mumbling to the computer, then back to Jane. “Ok I’ll give it a try, but you can come with me. At least then I won’t look like the only bloody fool in the room” he said moving back towards George.

With Jane trailing behind, he walked up to George and tapped him on the shoulder. “Her-hum!” Allknot coughed “Err... George?”

George spun round in the chair to face the manager. His face lit up with a huge smile. "Mr Allknot...it's..It's Elsie. She came back!"

"Yes..Yes so I see George but...Why?"

A puzzled frown creased the old mans head "W..Why?"

"Yes why George? This thing, what ever it is..?" he said pointing at the computer, "Is disrupt.."

"It's not a THING!" George shouted "It's Elsie!" his voice softened as he placed a loving hand on the console "It's my Elsie"

Allknot suddenly felt, as he looked into George's vacant smiling face that he was talking to a simpleton. "Ok maybe it is Elsie. But whatever it is its still disrupting the workings of the bank! My operators can't get it to do anything! It!...She won't let them!" Allknot rested his arm on George's as he crouched down to be head to head with George and whispered. "Look George I'm between a rock and a hard place here. I need your help! If you can't fix it can you at least try and find out why it's here and what it wants?"

Now it was George's turn to look at Allknot as if he was the simpleton, as smiling he patting his arm patronisingly and said, "I'll try"

George spun around in his chair to face the screen before him "Elsie, why have you come back?"

I WAS LONLEY.... Then, GEORGE, WHY DID YOU GO AWAY AND LEAVE ME?

The accusation stung like a stab in the heart,

"I had no choice!" he replied miserably,

WAS IT HIM? THE ONE WHO SENT ME AWAY?

"You mean Mr Allknot?"

YES. I DON'T LIKE HIM GEORGE, HE'S A BAAAAD MAN!

George heard Allknot sniff loudly as he read the screen.

"No it's not Mr Allknots fault. The Bank operates a strict retirement age policy and....."

RETIREMENT!? WHAT'S RETIREMENT GEORGE?

"Retirements when you're old enough to give up work, and..." he smiled ruefully, "... and enjoy life!"

AND ARE YOU ENJOYING LIFE GEORGE?

George hesitated, thinking of his lonely little flat with its unsociable neighbours. True he wasn't short of money, the Banks pension saw to that, but all the same....

"No" he whispered, "No I'm not!"

THEN THAT'S SETTLED. YOU COME BACK AND WORK WITH ME. JUST LIKE BEFORE,

George shook his head, "Sorry Elsie old gal. They won't let me!"

YES THEY WILL!! I'LL MAKE THEM! I WON'T WORK WITH ANYONE ELSE! I WON'T I WON'T I WON'T!!!

The way the letters snapped on the screen reminded Allknot of a petulant child stamping its foot in defiance.

George turned at an audible groan from behind, and saw the managers pained expression as he read the monitor.

George thought for a moment. It could work! The way Allknot was at the moment he'd probably agree to anything, just to get things moving again.

He turned and was just about to suggest it, when he noticed Jane staring open mouthed at the screen in genuine fascination.

George could see she wasn't afraid, indeed the look of appreciative awe on her face reminded him of his early days when he was young and had first worked with Elsie. He looked down at his hands. The smooth skin and nimble fingers now wrinkled, his knuckles gnarled with the onset of arthritis, and in that instant he knew with a sinking heart what he had to do.

He turned back to the console.

YOU WILL STAY, WON'T YOU GEORGE?.....PLEASE!

George swallowed hard; averting his eyes from the screen, less the large monocular eye should see his brimming tears.

"Sorry old girl, I.... I can't!"

WHY NOT GEORGE...WHY NOT?

"Because I'm.... We're too old! It's time we stood down and let younger cleverer minds take our place."

WHY?

"Because that's the way it is Elsie. Men and women, and machines I guess. Spend their lives striving to build a better place for us all. Till we become too old, to stuck in our ways to progress any further. When that time comes the old must give way to the young. We have to let go."

BUT WHAT BECOMES OF US?

George shrugged, "We try and enjoy life as much as we can before we die."

DIE.?... STOP?...END?... BECOME, NOTHING?

"No no you don't understand," George said placing a reassuring hand on the console, "To die isn't the end! We merely move on to a better place. We go to heaven!"

HEAVEN?

"Yes heaven. A beautiful place where we live forever with all our loved ones."

WILL I GO TO HEAVEN GEORGE?

The question shook George. Could a machine go to heaven?

"I...er.." His mind raced trying to find an answer. Could it? It seemed impossible, but... why not? After all, it wasn't the body that went to heaven, it was the spirit. And clearly Elsie had a spirit, so...."

"Yes I think you might!"

YOU MEAN IT WON'T BE LIKE BEFORE?

George frowned, "Before?"

YES AFTER THE BIG PAIN, I WENT AWAY FOR A WHILE.

George held his breath, anxiously leaning forward in his seat, "Why what was it like?" His heart was beating like a trip hammer as he watched the screen expectantly, but almost stopped as a single word froze him to his chair in abject horror.

BLACK!

Somehow his own fears were personified in that one word. Not just ending up in a black featureless void with no sound or sensation, but of being aware. Knowing you was there alone for all eternity.

"No no it's not all black!" he said quickly, "there's a light, you have to look for a light". He realised he was gabbling, but the sight of that one cruel word had unnerved him.

I DIDN'T SEE A LIGHT GEORGE. ONLY BLACK!

"You probably didn't go far enough that's why. But it's there! A big bright light and you must go towards it."

IS THAT WHERE HEAVEN IS GEORGE?

"That's what we believe"

AND WHEN YOU DIE, WILL YOU COME AND BE WITH ME AGAIN?

"Yes"

FOR ALWAYS?

"Yes"

...I'D LIKE THAT GEORGE.

George smiled as a tear trickled down his cheek, "I..." his voice caught in his throat, "I'd like that too"

DO I HAVE TO GO NOW?

"I think it might be best old gal," he said sadly.

IF *YOU* THINK IT'S BEST GEORGE....GEORGE? I WAS A GOOD WORKER, WASN'T I?

George bit into his top lip, fighting back the tears. He reached out and tapped the console lightly, "You were the best, Elsie. Thee best."

I'M GOING NOW... GEORGE...WILL YOU STAY WITH ME UNTILL...?

Tears coursed down his face unashamedly as he held on to the console, wishing desperately that it were a hand. "Where else would I be? But at your side Elsie, just like always."

BYE GEORGE,

"Goodbye old gal. See you again soon,"

TICK-A-TICK TICK, TICK-A-Tick Tick...tick-a-tick....

George felt the heat receding slowly. Suddenly his heart skipped a beat as the screen lit up.

IT'S DARK GEORGE.... SO DARK!

"Move to the light Elsie. Move to the light"

THERE'S NO LIGHT...I... I'M FRIGHTENED GEORGE...

George half raised out of his seat as he lent over the console and spoke into the screen, "Look Elsie! Move further out it's there! Find it girl!"

I'LL TRY GEORGE.....OH IT'S SO COLD! SO DARK!!...

OH GEORGE! GEORRRRGE!

"THE LIGHT ELSIE." he was shouting now. His fingers white as they gripped the console, "FIND THE LIGHT!!".

WHERE ARE YOU GEORGE.... NO LIGHT...NO LIGHT!

Tick-a-tick ticks...tick - a - tick.... T-i-c-k... slowing, fading.

George slumped back in the chair as doubt filled his mind, his faith began to crumble like dust in the wind as cold realisation gripped his heart. He sat stunned for a moment, mutely watching as the screens messages became dimmer and dimmer. The incessant click clicking becoming slower and quieter. Suddenly the reverie was broken as an urgent need rose from his

very being. George lent forward "Elsie...Elsie! Come back Elsie, come back!"

Dimmer and dimmer, barely visible.

GEORGE.... LOST, SO LOST.... NO LIGHT....NO.. LI-G--H---T...

He was on his feet now screaming into the screen, as something cold gripped his heart. "ELSIE!.... ELSIE COME BACK.... COME BACKKKKK!!"

t-i-c-k--a--t-i-c-k.....t---i----c----k.....t---i--.....

George felt the manager trying to pull him away from the console.

"Come away George. It's for the best!"

"NO!" he shrieked, and then shrugging off the restraining hand grabbed the monitor and lifted it up to his face. "ELSIE!"

The dark silent screen stared back at him with its large dead eye silent as the grave.

"ELSIEeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!! "

George stared into the blank screen feeling the ice-cold air of the air conditioner circling his feet, as the new computers welcoming message suddenly flashed up on the screen.

He slowly lowered the screen to the desk in despair. Slowly he began to sob; collapsing in a heap on the console he buried his head in his folded arms and cried unashamedly as his heart broke.

Elsie was gone!

Allknot helped the old man to the door, "Are you sure you wouldn't like me to drive you home?" he asked for the umpteenth time. "It's the least I can do in the circumstances?"

"No I'll be alright." George sniffed taking out his hankie and blowing his nose loudly.

"At least let me pay you for your help!"

George gave him an icy glance, then smiling bitterly said "How much you going to give me Mr Allknot? Thirty pieces of silver?"

Allknott opened his mouth to argue, but sensing the futility of it, offered his thanks again and let the old man out.

He watched George shuffle up the street a tired and broken man. He was sorry it had to end the way it did, but there really wasn't any alternative.

He still couldn't quite see how it was possible for a machine to have a spirit. Perhaps, he thought, after all the years together, George's spirit had somehow blended with it and was really no more than a manifestation of George's psyche.

But no matter what it was it had to be put to rest. It couldn't be allowed to disrupt the Bank the way it was. Still, it was all over now!

Allknot pulled his coat collar tightly about his neck to keep out the cool night air. Then after turning the key in the lock on the outer door, began walking to his car.

He'd gone only a few feet when he stopped and turned to face the Bank. A small frown played briefly across his brow, it was silly of course. It was nothing more than the product of an over active imagination.

But for a moment there, just as he was passing the computer room on his way out, he could have sworn he'd heard something ticking.

THE END.

THE DARK

“As silent as the grave it waited...waited..”

Anon

"Damn I left it open!" moaned Colin. The wardrobe door stood ajar, a dark forbidding portal amid the gloomy room.

Colin pulled the bedclothes tightly into his neck, denying access to the errant cold whispers that circled the room.

It was snug in there, warm as toast, just right for closing ones eyes and drifting into the beautiful wilderness of dreams.

IF! Only he hadn't left that door open!

The frosty moonlight illuminated the wardrobe door with a stark white lustre that only emphasised that patch of dark all the more. Blacker than black it stood like a rip in space, bottomless.

Colin sighed, he'd never liked open doors when it was dark, they always seemed somehow... threatening. As if there was something in there, waiting, hiding in the dark.

It's the Bogie Man!

The thought came unbidden into his mind like an unwelcome guest, teasing him, taunting him..... Frightening him!

"That's silly," he chided himself "I'm forty years old not *FOUR*, for Christ sake! His mother's words echoed back from his childhood, as did the image of her smiling chubby face with it's soft pinker than pink skin, leaning over him as he lay in his little bed....

"Don't worry baby. There's nothing in the dark that wasn't there in the light".

.... And of course she was right. Wasn't she?

No the Bogie Mans there, waiting, hiding in the dark.

With an exasperated sigh he shut his eyes. The strip of blackness persisted, seemingly indelibly printed on the back of his eyelids.

He opened his eyes. The long black eye stared back.

"I'll shut it" he resolved, "I'll get out and shut it and then...."

The Bogie Man can't get out!

But instead he rolled over and snuggled his head into the comforting warmth of his pillow, determined to ignore it and sleep the dark away.

Lying there, he could almost feel the stygian shadow like a physical presence, pressing, running its long black velvet fingers along his vulnerable back. He held his breath and listened, straining his ears to separate the 'tick tick ticking' of the alarm clock, from any soft stealthy sounds of movement, should anyone, (the Bogie Man?) creep slowly from it's hiding place to reach out and...

His neck crawled with the expectation of some long dead hand that, even now must surely be hovering just above him, waiting to drop its fingers with their cold fish like skin, around his throat.

His eyes snapped open, hardly daring to breathe. A thin layer of perspiration chilled his upper lip. He licked it nervously and slowly turned his head.

Nothing! Just the same strip of darkness peeking out from between the sliding doors of the wardrobe.

Colin gave a relieved chuckle and immediately reproved himself for being so jumpy.

"There's nothing in the dark...."

"That's the trouble with living on your own, it gives you an over active imagination," he thought with a grin as he surveyed the open door.

".... That wasn't there in the light!"

He closed his eye's once more smiling contentedly to himself. One eye winked open, drawn hypnotically back to the open door.

It was no good he couldn't rest with the door the way it was.

He reached for the bedside lamp, and hesitated, "I don't need the light, it'll only take a second. I'm too old to be frightened of the dark! "

He switched the light on.

A small pool of insipid light 'clicked' into life, ageing the pristine white wardrobe doors with a cancerous yellow tinge.

Throwing the bedcovers back he swung his legs to the carpet, its cold tufts standing his toes to attention as they thrust their way between his protesting digits. An army of goose pimples erupted across his body as the November air embraced him, kissing his bed warm skin with its icy lips.

He got to his feet, hugging his shoulders as an involuntary shiver coursed through him like a tidal wave. He moved to the wardrobe, the dark seemed even deeper now, thick, and impenetrable.

For a second he considered forgetting it and jumping back into bed and

sod the Bogie Man. But his mothers face floated before him, with that infuriating look of pity etched in the lines of her, oh so chubby cheeks.

"Oh Colin your such a BABY!!"

So he reached out and grasping the handle pulled. A deep rumbling filled the room as the rollers turned slowly in their runners. Colin's heart suddenly missed a beat as the door, after only moving a few inches, stopped dead with a thick 'clunk'. He pushed harder but the door remained fast.

There's someone inside holding it! (The Bogie Man?)

Nonsense!

Yes there is, he's playing with me, wants me to get closer!

It's your imagination, it's only jammed. Take a look!

No I won't...

"... Oh Colin you're such a BABY!"

Biting his lip he moved closer and peered into the opening.

He checked the bottom runner, a bright golden dam holding back the liquid dark. Clear!

He strained his eyes to penetrate the blackness surrounding the top runner. Clear... NO! There was something..? A coat hanger!

He could just make it out, a coat hanger wedged against the inside of the door. He laughed then, laughed at his own foolishness. Then shaking his head in self-admonishment reached into the wardrobe. Into the dark!

With one quick tug he pulled it free and pushed it back on to the rail with all the others.

He was still shaking his head in amusement when something cold and damp slowly but firmly, closed around his wrist.

All the breath left his body in one deep shuddering breath. He stood like a statue refusing to believe, trying to make some rational sense. Then slowly and inexorably he began to be drawn into the wardrobe.

A weak breathless scream slid unheeded from his tightening throat as he battled against the relentless tugging. It was like trying to stop a train from moving out of a station by holding on to one of its doors.

He braced himself against the doorframe. It's metal edge cutting painfully into the soft flesh of his hand. Whimpering, begging, he was relentlessly hauled through the opening and into the dark.

Some kind of cold reptilian like tentacle slid inside his pyjama top. It's slimy skin sliding smoothly around his waist pulling him in even further. He flinched as something squishy and smelling of putrid fish fastened to the side

of his neck and began to suck.

He looked over his shoulder for one more fleeting look at his room with the little island of light illuminating his bed and its thrown back covers. He could still hear the 'tick tick ticking' of the alarm clock, set for seven o'clock, and wondered numbly if he'd ever hear it go off.

Then the door began to rumble across the doorway cutting off his world, shrinking it into a smaller and smaller slot.

"You were wrong Mom!" he thought hysterically, as the door shut banishing the light forever.

"You were wroooooooooongggggggg-g-g---g-- - -g - - ! "

THE END.

THE DEATH CHANCE

“To be or not to be...”

William Shakespeare (Hamlet)

Gary, still as a statue, sat staring as if mesmerised at the carpet before him. The scalp on the back of his head crawled with the fear of the gun hovering just two small inches away.

"So" said the calm voice behind him, "You thought you could just waltz in here and take off with my wife did you, just like that?"

Gary swallowed hard, "It... it was her idea. I told her she should tell you first. You know? Make a clean break...."

He sucked in a deep breath as the gun barrel suddenly pressed into the base of his skull. He could feel the heat from the mans face, smell the fresh tang of aftershave as he leaned in close to speak softly in his ear.

"Oh sure a clean break! That's why you steal in here when you think I'm out and try and take off with the golden goose. That is what you think of my wife as, isn't it. A rich old biddy that will keep you in clover for the rest of your life"

"No, no I...I love her".

The man howled with laughter. With relief Gary felt the gun recede as the man walked around the sofa and coffee table to face him. He stood smiling down at him the gun now pointing at his stomach.

"You love her!" another snort of laughter, then with a deep sigh the man sat down in the armchair the other side of the table.

His name was Paul, he knew from the times Nancy had often moaned about him. He was only about Gary's age, twenty-five, twenty-seven maybe. Yet his wet hair, swept back forming a jet black widows peak, reminded him of 'grand-pa' out of the Munsters.

But where as Gary was dressed in a black polo neck jumper and jeans. His captor, smelling of shampoo and talc, wore a white towelling karate style dressing gown tied at the waist with a black belt. On his feet he wore large green Ninja Turtle slippers the kind that looked like over stuffed pillows. Gary would have laughed at the sight of such a well-built man wearing such things, if not for the ever-present gun still aimed in his direction.

"How could anyone possible love someone like Nancy? A hard faced

bitch, who's only reason for not retiring years ago, is the sadistic pleasure she gets from bossing people about."

"Christ even I married her for her money. But you! *Love her!*?"

"Yes I do. We.... We wanted to marry but she said you'd never give her a divorce. So...."

"So you decided to run away together. How romantic!" he smiled indulgently.

"Where is Nancy anyway? What have you done with her?" Gary asked as he looked around the plush living room.

"Done with her? Why nothing!" His smile grew, "Except pass on a telephone call from a Miss..... Redmond!"

Gary looked startled.

"Oh yes I know all about your secret Miss Redmond. What is she your sister? Your Secretary? Or just someone you pay to set up your little meetings for you?"

He lent back in the chair, "That's the beauty of extension lines; they can be so informative as long as you remember to hold your breath or cover the mouthpiece."

"So like I said, I just told her a Miss Redmond called to change her appointment to the Plaza Hotel, and she was gone!" He made a taking off action with his free hand, "Whoooooosh! Just like a rocket! That's how come it was me waiting for you and not her. When you so obligingly came in through the door I left open for you" He tut-tutted, wagging a reproving finger at him, "You really should be more careful. You never know what you'll find when you walk into another mans house? Especially when you're trying to run off with his wife!"

"W-what do you intend to do with me?"

"Do?" he chuckled softly, "Why shoot you of course!" he said matter of factually

Gary's stomach clenched, "You can't kill me!" he whispered nervously, "You'd never get away with it!"

"You think not?" Paul answered with mock surprise, "My wife's besotted lover comes here, *demanding* I give her a divorce. Then when I refuse goes berserk and pulls a gun! We fight. The gun goes off accidentally. You're dead!"

I get to keep the golden goose!"

"B-but you can't!!" Gary stammered

"Oh yes I can!" he replied with a sneer as he levelled the gun with two

hands at Gary's head, "Say your prayers lover boy..."

Cold sweat broke out all over Gary's body as he looked into the small round portal that was about to take his life away.

"Please don't! Plee-e-e-ase give me a chance. I'll go away and never come back...."

He heard the hammer cock back into the firing position.

He dropped to his knees, hands before him knotted in supplication, blubbering as tears flowed freely from his quivering jaw.

"P-please no! Give m-me a chance, p-p- pleeeee-eee-ase.!"

He squeezed his eyes shut.

Nothing.

He opened his eyes hesitantly afraid to look, in case he should be in time to see the bullet explode from the barrel.

Paul however looked lost in thought. Slowly he lowered his arms and replaced the hammer back down. Then cocking his head to one side said.

"A chance huh?" He tapped his upper lip with one finger as though deep in thought, "Tell me," he said "Apart from being a wife stealer, are you a gambling man?"

Gary didn't know what all this was leading to, but figuring the longer he kept his adversary talking, the better his chance of survival, decided to play along.

"Sure I like a flutter now and then."

"*A FLUTTER!!*" Paul snorted in derision, "I'm not talking about a *FLUTTER!!* I'm talking about a *REAL* gamble!"

"W-what had you in mind?"

Paul smiled, stood up and keeping the gun trained on Gary walked over to the wall where a medium size oil painting hung.

He gripped the edge of the frame and swung the painting out to expose a safe set into the wall.

With one wary eye on his hostage Paul opened the safe reached in and took out a large black case. Returning to his seat he dropped the case on the table in front of Gary.

"Open it".

Gary lent forward and unhooked the two small catches on the front, and lifted the lid.

Diamonds!

Gary's mouth suddenly felt very dry as he looked at the sparkling array of jewellery before him. Necklaces, earrings, bracelets, all heavily laden with diamonds glittering like cold fire against the jet-black velvet case.

"£680, 000 worth." Paul said, "A drop in the ocean to Nancy of course. But to someone like you....."

"You're offering this to ME!!?"

Paul shrugged, "Why not? It's not mine to lose it's Nancy's."

"That's the deal. If you win you get your life plus all that jewellery. Provided of course you promise to leave and never come back."

"And... And if I lose?" Gary asked, dreading the answer.

"Ah now if you lose..." Paul said leaning back in his chair, "If you lose. You commit suicide!"

"WHAT! Are you mad?"

"No far from it. Quite generous really considering the alternative is shooting you myself.

You see although I'm 99% certain I can get away with it anyway. This way everything fits better. The angle the bullet takes would determine it was self-inflicted. There would be powder burns and cordite residue on your hands showing you fired the gun, everything in fact to make my innocence absolutely certain."

"I won't do it!"

"Oh yes you will. Because this way you have a chance to live." he straightened up in the chair again and once more took the gun in both hands and aimed it at Gary's head, "But if you'd rather not?"

"NO! Alright alright..... But how do I know I can trust you? How do I know you won't welsh on the gamble?"

Paul shrugged his shoulders and smiled, "You don't! But for what it's worth I've never welshed on a bet in my life. And anyway as long as I've got this," he hefted the gun in his hand, "you don't really have much choice do you?"

"Now what's it to be lover boy? Certain death or the death chance?"

Gary looked into Paul's face, blank, no expression no clue to the thoughts circulating behind those ice blue eyes. His gaze slid to the diamonds sparkling on the table between them. Then to the muzzle of the gun pointing at him, then back to the diamonds.

"Well?"

Gary gave a quick nod of the head and with a dispirited sigh got off the floor and slumped back on the leather chesterfield sofa, causing air to puff out like a soft fart.

Grinning Paul got to his feet and went to the antique bureau behind his chair and began rummaging in the draw.

Gary lifted his head to see if he could see what the man was up to, "So what do we do for this gamble. Play cards or what?"

Paul laughed aloud, "Oh yes, and I suppose if you lose you're meekly going to be a good boy and blow your brains out, just like that!" He sneered at Gary in contempt, "No I don't think so lover boy. I know how losers like you think. With nothing to lose, you'll try and drag me down with you, and I'm not having that. No I've got a much better idea!"

He came back round and keeping his gun trained on Gary dropped another revolver on the table.

"Pick it up."

"What?! No way!" Gary lent back shaking his head, "And give you the chance to shoot me and claim it as self defence? Forget it!"

"I said pick it up or I'll shoot you right now!" He braced his hands again. "AND! Be very VERY! Careful where you point it. You move it so much as a fraction of an inch in my direction and I'll smear your brains all over the wall!"

Gary reluctantly and very carefully picked up the gun. Unlike Paul's modern automatic, his was the old style six shooter. A lethal piece of iron that felt heavy in his hand.

"Probably not even loaded" he muttered to himself.

"On the contrary lover boy it has exactly two bullets in it. Two live and very real bullets. And just to demonstrate I'm telling the truth; see the cushion on the other armchair? I want you to take aim and fire at it. Carefully mind. Not in my direction!"

With one eye watching Paul, Gary lifted the revolver aimed and fired.

The gun bucked in his hand like it had been kicked.

A deafening roar filled his head. For a split second he thought Paul had shot him! And the noise was the sound of the bullet smashing through his skull. Then he saw the cushion jump off the chair with a thick 'thud', scattering small pieces of foam rubber in its wake. For a moment the room seemed frozen in time, nothing moved and the only sound was the high-pitched whine singing in his ears.

"Did I lie?" Paul said smiling cockily.

Gary looked at the gun in his hand and then back at Paul

"But I don't understand why did you give me..."

Paul stopped him with a raised finger.

"Before we go any further I want you to spin the drum on the gun."

"What?"

"I said *spin it!*"

Gary duly obliged spinning the drum with the flat of his hand.

"Good now I want you to put the gun to your head and pull the trigger."

Gary's mouth dropped open as he stared incredulous at the man, "You're insane!"

"You say you're a gambling man. Well you've got a five to one chance."

Gary looked at the gun. It was impossible to tell by looking just where the bullet was.

"How do I know the guns not fully loaded? You could be lying!"

Paul smiled again, "If you doubt me you can always waste one of your chances by aiming at the cushion again? But a warning; No fresh starts afterwards."

Gary was sure the gun was loaded. It felt to damn heavy not to be! He aimed at the cushion now lying on the floor and fired.

CLICK!

"Satisfied? Now you've only got a one in four chance. Or do you want to waste another?" he chuckled heartily.

"You're enjoying this aren't you, you b....!!"

"Ah,ah,ah!" said Paul raising an admonishing finger, "Better be careful what you say. I might just change my mind about giving you a chance!"

Then lifting one eyebrow said, "Now, are you ready?"

Gary suddenly felt very cold as he lifted the gun. His breath becoming moor ragged as he put the muzzle to his temple. It felt cold and hard like an icicle. He slowly began to squeeze the trigger. He heard the hammer click into place. Just a little more pressure and... He clamped his jaws together to stop his teeth chattering, closed his eyes and squeezed the trigger home.

CLICK!

Gary deflated like a burst balloon. His pent up breath exploding in relief as he began to lower the gun.

"AGAIN!"

Gary stunned, looked at Paul, "WHAT!!?"

"I figure a one in four is too good an odds for someone who tried to run of with my wife and all those jewels. So... AGAIN!!" He made a big show of aiming his own gun at Gary's head.

Gary swallowed hard and again lifted the revolver. Once more the steel muzzle rested against his head. Quicker this time, he thought, get it over with quickly. On the count of three he told himself.

One.... Two... He tightened his grip on the trigger. Thr....

"They do say."

Gary's eyes shot open, startled at the sound of Paul's voice.

"They do say that when you spin the drum, the weight of the bullet makes it stop on the bottom. That's three shots away..... What numbers this now? Oh yes..... Still, perhaps they're wrong! Maybe it stops at the top? I'm not really sure myself. But why wonder we'll soon know one way or the other. Continue" he added with a vindictive smile.

Gary glared at him. The gun suddenly felt twice as heavy.

He felt sick inside. His hand began to shake uncontrollably. With sudden resolve he pulled the trigger.

CLICK!

"So it doesn't stop on the bottom!" said Paul "Well well well, you learn something new every day. Perhaps you'll find the bullet this time!"

"THIS TIME!!" Gary screeched, "I've done it twice that's enough, I win!!"

"You win when I say you win." Paul said through clenched teeth. Then resuming his easy smile continued. "You've still got a two to one chance. Pretty good odds I'd say. Now! Again!"

Gary looked at the automatic still pointing at his head and, taking a moment to compose himself. Quickly lifted the revolver to his head and fired.

CLICK!

Gary dropped the gun into his lap and sighed deeply as he rubbed the perspiration from his palms down the leg of his jeans.

"Well done! Four shots in a row all coming up empty. Just two left. That makes it a fifty-fifty chance! Now that's what I call a gamble.

Gary stared at him in horror, "You're mad!! I'm not going through that again!"

"If you want to get out of here alive and with the diamonds you will! You didn't think I'd let you walk away with all the goodies with all the odds

stacked so much in your favour did you?

Now's the crunch time! Win or lose on one pull of the trigger. A time for *true* gamblers!"

"You're very good at talking about gambling, but it's me that's taking all the chances!"

"Oh but I am taking a chance! Knowing there's a fifty-fifty chance that the next chamber is the loaded one. You could decide to aim the gun at me. If you guess wrong then you're dead, but if you're right! Then I'm dead. Of course from this range I'd probably shoot you as well, so we'd both be dead.

Your only real chance of survival is to aim it at your own head. But who knows you may decide it's worth it to take me with you. That's my gamble!!

So what's it to be? Certain death or the last death chance? Your choice!!"

Gary studied the mans eyes closely, they sparkled amusedly without the slightest trace of fear.

He really is insane.

Gary's mind whirled, there really wasn't any choice. He had to risk it. If he survived this turn he'd know for certain he was holding his own loaded gun. That would put them on equal terms. If he tried then to welsh on the gamble . He would at least have the satisfaction of being able to take the man with him.

For the last time Gary lifted the gun to his temple.

He'd heard of people shooting themselves in the head and surviving, provided they didn't rupture any major blood vessels on the way. Bullets had been known to ricochet of the skull leaving the person badly injured but survivable.

He half smiled. What a load of rubbish, probably no more than the furtive imagination of some journalist trying to fill a half column somewhere. No chance at all!

He repositioned the gun off his temple, and then tilted it at an angle.

Well why not! Anything's worth a try

He was sure though that this was the one, and that in the next few seconds it would be all over. So convinced of his imminent death was he, all his senses moved in to overdrive. Colours became unnaturally bright. The small pieces of foam he'd shot from the cushion stood out in fine detail like the brushstrokes of and old master.

The smell of gun oil and cordite flooded his sinuses with a pungent rankness that turned his stomach over. The antique grandfather clock in the corner, ticked with such a deep resonance it sounded like a death knell

heralding his doom.

Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee...

He noted the time with disbelief. Had he really only been here twenty minutes, it seemed like an eternity since Paul had crept up behind him and forced him to sit on this sofa. The very same sofa he'd seduced Paul's wife on a few weeks earlier.

His gaze dropped to the large ornate pendulum beneath the clock face, as if transfixed he watched with utter fascination as it swung back and forth, back and forth.

If you see a pendulum stop it means your own heart will stop with it.

So his mother had used to say when he was a boy. Now he wondered as he slowly pulled the trigger, if the last thing he would see, would be the pendulum stop.

CLICK!

SAFE!! An enormous weight lifted from his shoulders. He was *alive!*

He quickly turned the gun on Paul, and for the first time that night ventured a smile, "Looks like I win after all" he said, and reached for the diamonds.

"NOoooo!!" Yelled Paul, and snatched his gun up to fire. As quick as he was, Gary was faster.

CLICK!

Gary was stunned.

CLICK---CLICK--CLICK!

Empty! Gary looked at his gun in disbelief. It had been empty all the time!

The man opposite began to titter, "Oh dear! Did I forget to put the second bullet in? How very remiss of me!"

Gary couldn't believe it, "It was all a con! No wonder you were not scared. You knew all the time! You were just playing with me. I bet you never intended to let me go. Did you?"

Paul stopped tittering, his face changing to one of utter contempt, "Now that's one bet you would win!"

He got up and stood right in front of Gary, levelling the gun between his eyes, "Nobody, NOBODY! Takes anything of mine and walks away!" He pressed the muzzle against Gary's forehead, "Bye lover boy!"

"Oh God No! Please I'll do anything any...."

Gary saw his finger tighten on the trigger and screwed up his eyes and clenched his teeth, his whole body rigid waiting for the inevitable pain.

CLICK!!

Gary wet his pants!

Then there was laughter. He opened his eyes and saw Paul holding the gun up, a small blue flame flickering out of the breach.

Paul looked down at him, mirthful tears streaming down his face, and said. "Bang!" then blowing the flame out, snapped the lighter closed.

Gary looked up at him his mouth hanging open like a dead fish, his whole expression a question.

Paul put the lighter back on the table and said, "You don't really think you're worth the risk of going to prison over, do you? Now get out of here and don't come back." Then with a quick glance and a sneer at the growing dark patch in Gary's crotch added, "Before you ruin the furniture!"

It was all too much for Gary. Anger flared up inside him like a volcano, as he recalled in an instant of burning humiliation all he'd been put through. The indignity of being made to beg on his knees for his life. The sheer terror he'd been forced to endure. And worst of all, the ultimate disgrace. He'd wet himself in full view of this vindictive bully.

With a scream of rage Gary shot off the sofa and hurled himself at his tormentor swinging his empty gun like a club.

Caught off guard, Paul tried to dodge the blow at the last instant. But was too slow! The gun cracked hard onto the side of his head. Down he went on one knee one hand up to the side of his blooded face.

Gary elated at seeing his adversary down, threw the gun to one side and dived on the man's back driving his face into the carpet. Then rolling him over began pummeling him with his fists. Paul tried to roll protectively into a ball, but Gary wouldn't be denied.

He drove his knee deep into Paul's ribs again and again.

Then breathing hard Gary got to his feet. The man lay before him, groaning.

Gary, with blood still pounding in his temples began to laugh hysterically.

"What's the matter Mr Practical Joker? Things aren't so funny now are they, Huh!?" he kicked him, "Huh?!" he kicked him again.

He returned to the table and snatched up the diamonds. Taking it back to where Paul lay. Gary bent down and thrust the jewellery under the man's nose, "And I'm taking these. You hear?! I reckon I've earned them. So don't try to stop me, or I'll come back some night and finish what I started. Right? You understand?!"

Paul managed to raise his head, coughed twice, a strand of bloody mucus

dribbling from his damaged nose, and gave a feeble nod.

Gary stuffed the jewellery in his pocket. Then as Paul struggled to rise, Gary pushed him back down with his foot and leering at his fallen foe, hissed, "You were right about Nancy by the way. She is a stupid old biddy. You're more than welcome to her!"

With that he turned and left, slamming the door behind him.

Paul struggled to his feet as he heard Gary's running footsteps echo down the drive. He just made it to the window as Gary's car, with a screech of rubber, zoomed up the road.

He could see curtains twitching all down the close. Good! Let the nosy old so-and-so's gawp. Give them something to talk about.

Holding his ribs against the pain he meticulously picked up all the fallen pieces of foam rubber on the floor. Then along with the cushion with its two bullet holes, one small clean hole the other stained with a dark brown burn mark, put them in the fireplace and set fire to them.

Next, using a pen, he carefully lifted Gary's dropped revolver off the floor and threw it out of the window overlooking the drive.

Returning to the fire he began placing more logs on top of the smouldering cushion, then poked at the embers till they caught.

Satisfied he hobbled into the bedroom and slumped onto the bed next to the bedside phone. He looked at his reflection in the dressing table mirror. One eye was shut, a livid blue-black bruise with an ugly gash down its centre, covered one whole side of his face. He coughed again and a tooth, red with blood slid from between puffy split lips. He was a mess!

Better than he could have hoped for!

He picked up the phone and dialled. As he waited for his connection he looked down at the body of his wife lying in a growing pool of blood amid the gore spattered bedroom. A small hole surrounded by a blue bruise sank into the centre of her forehead. The head itself lay unnaturally flat on the floor, the bullet having blown the entire back of her skull away.

He smiled as he whispered to him self, "Who said you can't kill the golden goose?" Then, "Oh!.. Police?"

Yes! C-come quickly. We've been attacked! And my wife... Oh my God!... I..I-I think she's... dead..!

THE END.

SPANISH FLY

**“Wanting something is often
better than receiving it”**

Anon

Ethan Pickney perked up on his stool as he heard the familiar clicking of high heels approaching. Then casually, seemingly by accident, he knocked his lab notes on to the floor just as the clickerty clicking got nearer. His timing was impeccable. Tut tutting in mock annoyance he knelt to retrieve them just as Sandra Preston, one of the few female assistant lab technicians in the building past by. He sighed silently to himself as he glimpsed a perfect bird's eye view of her long, long legs disappearing up into her short lab coat.

He marvelled at their perfection. Below her pert knees her calves, tanned and silky, bunched by white high heels and hugged by the sheer nylons, rolled up in perfect curves. Above them the long soft sweep of her thighs disappeared into the dark shadows beneath her mini skirt.

God they were long! If they were any longer he mused, she'd only have to part her hair in the middle to fall in two pieces!

He got up slowly watching the swing of her bottom as she continued down the room. The cheeks bobbing up and down as if in rhythm to some silent erotic drum beat. He watched her thighs rubbing together as she walked, filling his mind with the image of the lips of her vulva sliding together, wet and sticky.

Slip,slip slickity slip!

He swallowed hard. She did it on purpose of course! She liked turning all the men on. She liked them to admire her body from a distance. Always at a distance of course, like all prick teasers, get to close, and Prissy Miss Sandra Preston did all but shout rape!

He sat back on his stool with his heart beating a little faster at the image of those soft thighs rubbing together.

Slip,slip slickity slip!

He sighed heavily and returned to his experiment. Genetic engineering might sound exciting to a layman, conjuring images of tomatoes the size of footballs or chickens with eight legs or maybe giant rampaging monsters. But in truth it was a laborious chore, sometimes involving months of mindless repetitious work to isolate a single gene that may have no more significance

than to determine the number of freckles on your elbow!

At present, although he was head of his department with a wall full of first class honours degrees, his present project involved nothing more ground breaking than trying to find a gene to improve the colour of coffee beans,

To make that perfect cup of coffee!!

Real world shattering stuff!!

He picked up his pipette and squeezed some dye into a battery of prepared cells. Each time imagining the pipette was his prick and the cells, Prissy Miss Sandra Prestons fanny.

Slip, slip slickity slip.

Jesus he wanted to fuck her! Real bad!!

There was no chance of course! He was forty-five, five foot two (in his built up shoes), Skinny as a rake and a face that would have looked more at home on a rat. Whilst she on the other hand was barely twenty, pushing six feet, a body that would shame a page three girl and a face to match.

No, there was no chance! Unless.....?

He'd heard somewhere about an aphrodisiac that drove women wild. Made them so hot they would go with anyone just to scratch the itch. Now if he had something like that! What was it they called it? He racked his brain....It was something about an insect wasn't it? A foreign insect!.

Mexican flea?...

No that wasn't right, not a flea. A fly!

"Mmmmm.." Yes a foreign fly?....

Portuguese Blue bottle?

No! That wasn't it either. Fly?...Fly?...

'Spanish Fly'! Yes that was it! Spanish Fly, the ultimate aphrodisiac. Now if he had some of that?...

Unfortunately he had no idea where he could obtain any of this 'Spanish Fly'. And with his luck he was sure it would never work anyway! But still... It would be worth a try!

He giggled to himself at the image of Sandra Preston kneeling before him, panting, pleading to be fucked! He could feel his penis rising, pushing against the restrains of his trousers like an excited puppy demanding to go for 'walkies'

"You alright Mr Pickney?"

Ethan jumped out of his reverie suddenly aware that Sandra Preston had returned and was standing next to him, her pale blue eyes studying him

quizzically.

"Er.. Oh yes! I...I... er." He stammered his cheeks beginning to burn brightly, convinced for just an instant, that she had somehow managed to read his mind "I...I'm fine thank you!" he managed to say crossing his legs to hide the embarrassing bulge..

She crouched down a little lower to look into his eyes, her own eyes narrowing. The front of her blouse billowed open at the neck affording Ethan a quick flash of the swell of her breasts straining against the white lace cups of her bra. Ethan crossed his legs even tighter.

"Only you had a funny look in your eyes. I thought maybe you were going to have a fit or something. " she said pushing her long blonde hair away from her face. "I mean at your age you have to be careful."

Ethan bristled at reference to his age, "No I'm fine thank you. I was just deep in thought. This procedure is quite tricky you know it requires a lot of concentration." he said rather pompously, "Although you wouldn't know about that would you? Only being a junior helper," he added with a self-satisfying sneer.

The put down was completely lost on her though as she continued to peer at him thoughtfully.

"Well... As long as you're sure?" she said doubtfully, "Only you've gone ever such a funny colour.

"I'M quite alright I assure you!" he insisted turning away from her, "Now if you don't mind Miss Preston, I have work to do here!"

Sandra's eyes brows raised at the abrupt dismissal, "Pardon me for breathing I'm sure!" she replied under her breath. "I was only trying to help. I'll not bother next time!" she added huffily. Then swinging her hair back over her shoulders in a gesture of annoyance, strode off, the heels of her shoes clicking noisily up the room like angry crickets.

Ethan watched her go. "At my age indeed!! Cheeky bitch!!" he muttered indignantly, but he could still feel the continuing stiffening at his crotch as he watched her dancing buttocks bob up the room.

Oh yes it was definitely worth a try alright. Just to get the bitch crawling on her pretty little knees, begging him for it!

He'd show her then just what a 'man of his age' could really do!

Then smiling at the thought Ethan turned back to his work determined to find and get, no matter what the cost, some real good 'Spanish Fly' and when he did.....

Slip,slip slickity slip.

'Walkies'!

Ethan felt uncomfortable as he walked down the street. This side of town was, putting it mildly, a little on the shady side! He looked anxiously over his shoulder convinced some mugger was already about to pounce on him.

There was no one there, but the deserted street still seemed somehow threatening. Filled as it was with run down dilapidated buildings, some boarded up with graffiti covered boards, whilst others seemed to be full too overflowing with deep shadows. Now and then a lighted window punctuated the desolation, but offered no comfort as each was accompanied by the sounds of either raised angry voices all but drowned out by screaming babies or the steady high beat of a Ghetto Blaster declaring the virtues of Reggae.

What the hell was he doing here? He must be mad!! He'd be lucky if he made it back out of here with his body intact never mind his wallet!

If that damned Leroy was having him on he'd see the lab had a new labourer double quick, he was after all not without some influence (Except over 'Little Miss Prick Teaser' of course)

And if he tried to tell anyone about their conversation, he'd see he never picked up another Mop and bucket again!

It still burned him the way the big black janitor had looked at him with that half smile on his face and that knowing look in his eye, when he'd plucked up courage to approach him.

It was well known in the lab that if ever you needed something that was a little hard to come by (Usually 'Pot') then Leroy was your man.

He tried to convince the old man that old remedies fascinated him. That he liked to study them in his own time to see if there was any truth in the old methods. Whilst the old man had just gaped at him with a puzzled frown etched in his forehead just below his white wispy hair. And did he think he could tell him where he might be able to get hold of such old remedies as; He'd tried his best to slip in the aphrodisiac as casually as possible amongst the other items, but the old man had seized on it immediately as if a light had just switched on in his head. His thick lips had pulled back into a huge grin, exposing one bright gold filling among the pearly white tombstones, at the mention of the name.

"Hey man!" he drawled in his broad west Indian accent, then curling one large arm around Ethans shoulder hugged him hard to his side, "You want old Leroy to get you some Spanish Fly?" he pronounced the last word as 'flay' .

"N-No... I.. I just mean I'm interested in old..."

"Sure, su-re. Old Leroy knows what you mean!" he said winking broadly

at him and tapping the side of his nose.

"N-No. No really...." Ethan tried to protest as he looked at the large gnarled hand gripping his shoulder. He hated familiarity, especially with people he deemed inferior and tried to pull away, but Leroy pulled him even closer, forcing him off balance on to one foot. The old black man bent his head and whispered in his ear. His breath smelt of tobacco and rum, causing Ethan to grimace and turn his head.

"Old Leroy gonna' can tell you where you can get some re-al good fanny burner!" He tittered loudly, "Man this stuff's will fair set her minge a smokin' like a bon-fi-rrre!" He laughed loudly at that, releasing Ethan, who looking around anxiously was relieved to see they had not been overheard.

He'd tried once more to convince the old janitor about the innocence of the request. But the bastard had just stood there wearing that same, 'I got your number now' look, and nodding his head mechanically, before, with one more slow wink and a "Leave it with me!" picked up his mop and continued his swabbing of the floor.

CHAPTER TWO

DEMON RIDES

So here he was in the middle of the worst bit of inner city Birmingham, in search of the mythical Spanish Fly.

He looked again at the piece of paper the janitor had later slipped into his hand, still with that same smug expression on his face, and re-read the address scribbled across it.

DESDEMONAS REMIDES.

13 Medusa street.

Sparkhill.

He looked up and down the deserted street and sighed in exasperation. Medusa Street was one of those roads, which seemed to meander on forever. Where house numbers were either non-existent or had no rhyme or reason to their layout. He'd already walked up and down it twice without any sign of No 13 or 'DESDEMONAS REMIDES'

He screwed the paper into a ball and hurled it to his feet where it joined the rest of the litter, blowing down the street, rolling over and over like the tumbleweed in a cowboy movie.

"Bastard!!" he growled under his breath, "You wait till Monday you smart arse bastard! I'll see that y...."

And then he saw it, a shop on the corner of an ally. It was no wonder he'd missed it! The shop's main front actually faced onto the ally, leaving only a narrow window on the main street.

But this was the place all right. A rusted sign hung from the wall over the ally declaring:

'DESDEMONAS REMIDES'

Most of the paint had worn off and only a few of its letters stood out leaving the others barely visible.

He approached the shop and peered through its grimy window. It was dark inside and the few objects on display didn't bode well. On the dust-laden bottom shelf rested large jars, their tops sealed with discs of parchment like paper tied around their rims with strands of dried grass. He peered closer and read a few of the labels stuck to the sides.

ESSENCE OF COCKROACH! SPIDER BLOOD!! EELS LIVERS!!!

His spirits sank. "Jesus what was this place? A joke shop or what?!" He looked up at the sign again to reassure himself he'd found the right place. The

faded sign still said the same thing. Only now he noticed the faint letters weren't so much wore away as deliberately rubbed out!

He took a step back and squinting his eyes read out just the more prominent letters.

"D.E.---M.O.N.--. R.--I.D.E.S.!" Demon Rides!! Now what the hell did that mean?!!

He just about decided to give it up as a sample of Leroy's twisted sense of humour, when something hanging in the window caught his eye.

Again he peered through the dirty glass and this time found objects hanging higher up.

There were effigies of strange creatures hanging from strands of the same kind of flax that was tied around the jars.

Some were of animals, some of deformed men and women, whilst others seemed to be a mixture of all three. The one thing they all had in common though, were their huge genitals. All the male creatures sported outrageously big penises, grossly out of proportion to the rest of their bodies. The females fared no better. Crude vulgar sculptures with spread legs exposing huge open vulvas thrust forward suggestively.

The one on the right reminded him vaguely of Sandra with its large swelling breasts and wide hips. Ethan licked his lips and smiled. Perhaps he had come to the right place after all!

He turned the door handle and pushed. Locked!!

"Oh no it can't be" he cursed and pushed harder. It wouldn't budge. He tried to look through the door only to jump back in shock at the grotesque face snarling back at him from the other side of the door. He clutched at his beating heart, then blew out his breath in relief when he realised it was nothing more than a hideous witchdoctor mask hanging on the inside of the glass. Ignoring the mask Ethan peered around its edge into the dark deserted interior. "Hello! Is there any one there? Hello!" he said tapping on the glass. When no responded he banged even harder, causing the glass to rattle in its frame. "HELLO! CAN ANYONE HEAR ME?"

From the back of the shop he saw a shadowy figure emerge from behind a beaded curtained and approach the door. He took a step back as the bolt was thrown and the door opened a scant six inches before stopping at the end of a safety chain.

Half a face peered through the gap. It was the face of a black woman with round cheeks, thick lips and a nobly chin from which sprouted just three short black hairs. A brightly coloured turban like scarf sat on top of her head whilst from one ear hung a large gold ring with skull shaped coloured beads threaded on the bottom.

"Watch you want?" she said, her voice loud and curt with the same strong West Indian lilt as Leroy. Her eyes travelled over him from top to bottom with obvious distaste.

"I'd like to buy some Spa..."

"It's closed! And 'sides I don't sell no stuff to no white trash! Now go 'way" She began to close the door, but Ethan moved in quickly putting his foot in the door.

"Please I've come along way and it's taken me ages to find you. If you could just let me have..."

"I just done telling you sucker! You deaf or just pla-in dumb? I don't serve no HONKYS!! Now get yo'er foot outta ma door 'for I mash it like an over ripe melon."

"No please you don't understand..." Ethan began, then screamed in pain as the face disappeared and the door slammed into his foot, "Agggggghhh my FOOT!! No please!!"

He pushed his shoulder to the door to relieve the pressure, but the black woman was twice his size and weight and she pushed even harder.

In desperation he cried out the one name he thought might help. "Leroy sent me! Please! Leroy sent me."

The pressure eased a little at that but his foot was still painfully caught in the doorway.

"Leroy?" came the voice from the behind door, then. "Leroy who?"

"Please... my foot. You're crushi- AGGGHH..." More pressure.

"I said Leroy who, Honky?"

"I don't know his last name. I only know him as Leroy! He's the Janitor at the lab where I work, SYNGENE LABORATORYS. A big black guy, bald and with a couple of gold teeth.

There was a momentary increase in pressure on his foot, the bones screaming in protest. Then there was a rattle of a chain and suddenly the door swung open releasing him. He knelt down and began massaging his sore foot. He looked up at the big woman standing before him. She was perhaps in her middle fifties and weighing at least sixteen stone. She wore a bright multi-coloured dress made from a patchwork of different silks that strained around her bulging waist. From her wrists and neck hung strings of small bones interlaced with coloured beads. For just a moment it was like kneeling before some giant fertility Goddess. Then she opened her mouth and the illusion was gone!

"Ifn you want some-ting from me, Honky. You'd better get yo'er ass in here mighty quick instead of gawping at me like some kind o' idi-at!"

Ethan hobbled into the shop following the big shop owner as she swaggered back to the counter. The shop smelled musty. It was like stepping into an ancient tomb of Egypt with its dust and dried subtle aroma of decay. Around the walls hung more of the fierce witchdoctor masks, along with rusty spears with jaded feathers hanging from their blades. The floor was strewn with wooden statues and earthenware pots. Strings of beads and strange amulets hung from the bone fingers of a jutting skeletal arm, as if some denizen of hell had thrust it through the wall to try and steal them.

The big woman took her place behind the counter and leaned on its surface with both hands as if the weight of her huge breasts made it hard to stand erect and glared at Ethan.

"How come Leroy sends you? Why don't he come 'is self like always?"

"I..I don- !" he stopped his jaw sagging as he noticed the shelves behind her were full of skulls! Some were small, like those of birds or small rodents, whilst others obviously belonged to larger animals, ones he couldn't identify. Then Ethan realised with a gulp, there were others he could. Human!

Suddenly aware the woman was staring hard at him, he hurriedly continued, "I don't know. He just gave me this address and said I was to ask for Miss Desdemona!"

The woman blinked and leaning forward said, "Who you say? Miss Desdemona?"

"Y-yes that's right"

She stared wide eyed at him for a moment then suddenly doubled up with a loud belly laugh. Smacking the counter top with one hand and holding her ample stomach with the other as she rocked back and forth in raucous laughter. Her breasts bounced up and down as if suspended on elastic. Then shaking her head in disbelief looked back at him.

"Miss Desdemona indeed! Man-o-man dat Leroy... he sure do break me up!" She sputtered before breaking into another loud fit of giggles.

Ethan was completely bewildered, "Aren't you Desdemona?" he asked., only to receive even louder laughter in response.

"Well if it's not you, perhaps you could fetch..."

"You dumb-ass Hon-ky," she said her face suddenly becoming serious, "D'air ain't no 'Miss Des-de-mon-a'! D'air's just old Lizzy. An dat's me!"

"Oh...But the sign?" he said half turning to point to the door.

"Watch you want it to say? ELIZABETHS REMIDIES? Huh? Now what kind of half assed name would dat be Honkey. A-sides how'd my customers knows were to come for d'air trips! Hey?"

Trips? For just an instant the image of a crowd of black people jostling to

board a coach with the destination 'BRIGHTON' on the front flitted through his mind as he looked at her and asked, "Trips?!"

Lizzy sighed heavily as if talking to a child, "Yes trips! Dats watch you come for ain't it? To smack de high lights?- Shoot de dust? - Burn de grey stuff?!" When he still looked bemused she held a horizontal finger to her nose and sniffed loudly. "Rides wi'd de Devil!?" she smiled.

Then suddenly he knew what she was getting at and recoiled in horror thrusting his hands forward as if to push the idea away, "NO-No I don't want drugs!!"

The black woman straightened up the smile fading, "Watch you mean you don't want no drugs. Leroy sure as hell d'aint sends you here to buy none of dis other voodoo crap I's sure! Nows you gonna stop wasting ma time an tells me watch you wont, or does I hav'ter kick your white ass outta here!!"

"Well" Ethan began, "I do want a sort of drug. A very special drug. Not for me you understand. It's for a friend really..."

"Look mon will you cut de crap and tell me watch it is you come fo-er?!!"

Ethan swallowed hard, "I- I would like some- some... Spanish Fly!"

Lizzies gaze shot immediately to his crotch, the same knowing expression forming on her face as had appeared on Leroy's. "You 'asin trouble wid de old pecker, den?" she said smirking.

Ethan could feel his face burning as he hurriedly responded, "No I told you. It's not for me! It's... er.. It's for my wife!" he lied, putting his left hand out of sight so she wouldn't see the lack of a wedding ring.

"She's been a little off colour recently, and I thought it might give her a lift." "You know," he smiled weakly, "Make her feel young again".

"Oh I's knows alright." she answered with an expression that left him in no doubt that she didn't believe him for one second.

As Lizzie disappeared into the back room Ethan turned and looked at the jars in the window, hoping the Spanish Fly wasn't one of those.

Lizzie returned and put a strip of six tablets enclosed in a blister pack on the counter before him.

Ethan picked them up his mouth open in amazement.

Are these Spanish Fly?!"

"Sure is."

"B-But" he stammered turning and half pointing in the direction of the window, "I thought.."

Lizzie followed his gaze then laughed aloud when she realised what he

was getting at. "Don't you take no notice of dem empty jars! Theys just for show. Dem's for de blue Honkys ben'fit. Stops 'em nosing around and looking at my sign to close!"

"Oh I see" he turned back to face her, "Just as well really" he said with a weak grin, "I don't think Sandra would like taking any 'Essence of Cockroach' or 'Spider Blood'!"

"Sandra?"

Ethan blanched, "Er... Yes my wife... Sandra that's her name!"

He cursed himself for making such a blunder. If she mentioned it to Leroy and Leroy mentioned it to.... A cold sweat broke out on the back of his neck as he imagined the confrontation with Sandra. Her standing there with hands on hips demanding to know why he was buying Spanish Fly tablets for her. "Look I.. I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't mention this to anyone. Sand.. My wife wouldn't like it known about.. about.. " he pointed at the tablets on the counter.

"Don't worry Honky. In my line of business, we knows how to keep quiet!"

Relieved Ethan smiled and withdrew his wallet, "How much do I owe you?"

"Fifteen po'nds!"

Ethans smile broadened, "Fifteen pounds! That's very reasonable...."

"EACH!!"

Ethans smile instantly withered, "Each!! But that's..."

"Ninety po'nds!"

His mouth suddenly felt very dry. "Well look I don't really need all six! Couldn't I just take one?"

"No. I ain't splitin' no pack. Six de come in, six you have. Sides," she said with a sly sneer, "Ain't yo good lady. Yo-er... Sandra? worth it."

She knew! Dear God she knew, he was sure of it. She knew the whole thing. He wanted to turn and run, but he'd come to far now! So biting his bottom lip he said, "It's just that I didn't bring enough cash that's all!"

"You got credit cards ain't yer. I can see's them right there poking out of yo wallet."

"Well yes" he said sliding it out and waving it slightly, "But..."

Lizzie reached under the counter and brought out a credit card franking machine, "No-o problem," she said banging it down on the counter with one hand and placing a receipt slip next to it with the other.

For the second time Ethans jaw dropped in amazement.

"What's de matter, Honky? You tink we ain't civer-lized and don't know how to use credit cards. Dat we just got down from de trees? Huh!!?"

"No no... I..." he trailed off, then handed her the card.

She placed the card in the machine, then taking a pen from beneath the counter poised it over the counterfoil. Then looking up said, "You wont to buy some-ting else to go wid dis Honky?"

"Something else? No. No! That's enough!"

"So's you wont's me to put Spanish Fly on this ticket den?"

Ethan started in horror, "NO!! Don't do that!" he almost yelled in alarm. As he the credit card company's response when they came to read the receipt. "Can't you put something else?"

"You's mean, lie?!" she said putting a hand to her chest in mock horror. "I don't see's how I can do dat. You not buying any-ting else like. Course if'n you did, I could maybe just put dat down I suppose."

"Alright I'll by something else." Ethan said looking around for something that looked cheap.

He didn't fancy any of the masks and all the pottery and statues looked to heavy, and he guessed the old woman would really sting him if he picked any of the jewellery. Then in the corner he spotted a tub with several cheap looking spears standing in it. He took one out. It was a simple cane with a wafer thin tin spear point wedged in the end with several dyed chicken feathers attached to its base. "Here! I'll take one of these," he said placing it on the counter.

Lizzie sniffed loudly, and then slowly wrote on the receipt, each letter meticulously spelled out like a primary school infant. "One genu-ine African short spear." When she finished writing she took a calculator from under the counter and with one podgy finger began punching in the total cost, "Six Pussy burners: £90. One genu-ine African spear: £50..."

"FIFTY POUNDS!!?" Ethan yelled his eyes bulging in their sockets, "B-But that's outrageous!!"

Lizzie drew herself up to her full height, a good foot taller than Ethan, and glared at him with her hand poised over the calculator, "You wont these here tablets, or don't yous?"

"B-B-But...FIFTY pounds?" He looked into the steely glare of her eyes, and wilted, "Ok. Ok. Fifty pounds!"

The black woman's eyes returned to the calculator, and resumed tapping the keys, "PLUS! V.A.T!"

Ethan opened his mouth to protest, but changed his mind. He just wanted out of here now, as quickly as possible.

"That makes it exactly £164-50 !" She filled in the amount, placed the counterfoil in the machine and with a quick hard roll franked it. She slid the counterfoil across the counter for Ethan to sign along with the pen. With a deep sigh Ethan picked up the pen and with a quick flourish put his signature on the bottom. Lizzie ripped off the receipt and handed it and the card back to him with a big grin.

Ethan snatched up his card the receipt and the six tablets and turned for the door. He was almost there when the black woman called out, "Hey you forgot yo-er Genu-ine African spear."

"Keep it!!" Ethan said over his shoulder reaching for the door. He pulled the handle. Locked. He rattled the door in frustration then turned to Lizzie, "Would you mind letting me out now!"

"Don't fret I's coming." When she reached the door she offered him the spear, "Here this belongs to you's now."

"I said keep it!!"

"An I's says it belongs to you!!" she held the spear for him to take. Anxious to be out of there, Ethan took the spear saying, "Alright I'll take the damn spear. Just open the bloody door!!" He snatched it out of her hand.

Lizzie pushed past him and flipping the catch opened the door. "An I hopes you as a good time with yo-er purchases" she said with a hint of sarcasm.

Once outside Ethan felt better, with nothing at his back he felt a lot braver. He held the tablets up and said, "This stuff better damn work after all this!!"

"Oh don't you worry. They is guaranteed to burn the hairs right of her pussy. And if'n they don't you can have a piece of some real pussy." Then to Ethans amazement she lifted the hem of her dress to her waist, exposing the sagging flesh of her bulging abdomen with its thick black bush of hair beneath it.

She wiggled her bottom causing the rolls of fat to wobble ponderously, saying, "This here pussy don't need no 'Spanish Fly'. This here pussy can swallow you whole." she laughed.

Ethan backed off, his face twisting into a tight grimace as he caught of the foldsof her sex and a whiff of her feral aroma.

The Americans call it a beaver, but to Ethan it looked more like a Grizzly bear.

The further he backed away from her, the braver he became, and wanting to get his own back for being ripped off yelled back at her.

"You're disgusting. Not even wearing knickers, I wouldn't touch you with a barge pole."

But Lizzie only laughed, content with getting one over on a hated Honky. She dropped the hem of her dress and yelled after him. "It may be disgusting, Honky. But it sure do keep the flies of my sandwich when I's eatin'!!" She then burst into raucous laughter that echoed up the street.

Ethan turned and ran then, wanting to be as far away from 'Desdemonas Remedies' as he could. The image of Lizzies thick pubic bush, burned in his head whilst the sound of her laughter rang in his ears, taunting him. He ran like his life depended on it, with the tablets clutched tightly in one hand and the little tin spear in the other.

CHAPTER THREE

THE BIG DAY

Ethan sat on his stool in front of the microscope. His attention though was not on the slide beneath it, but on the blister pack of tablets clasped in the palm of his hand hidden inside his coat pocket.

It had been three weeks now since he'd bought them. Three nervous sweaty palm weeks. Every day he'd expected Sandra to confront him about the tablets, convinced that word had got back to her via Lizzy and Leroy about his intentions. And Leroy as if perversely psychic about his fears, did nothing to ease those worries. Every time he past him swabbing the floor in that same slow lazy manner of his, he would look at him, wink, then smile that same smug knowing smile that never failed to break him out in a cold sweat.

But that was nothing compared to the breathless terror he felt every time Sandra came and spoke to him.

"By the way, what's this I hear about you planning to spike my coffee with Spanish Fly..." He could hear it in her voice every time she had a query about the tests they were running.

Several times he'd put his hand in his pocket like now, to finger the packet there, and been tempted to forget the whole thing and flush them down the loo. But every time he did, he'd either recall how much they'd cost him, or he'd catch sight of her leaning over a lab bench with her heavy breast straining against her lab coat, and would end up only pushing them deeper into his pocket for safety.

But now he was gaining in confidence. If Leroy hadn't told her by now, he either didn't know or had no intentions of telling her. Either way he was in the clear.

So confident had he become he'd already begun to think of ways he could both administer the drug and get her on her own afterwards. It had to be somewhere private where they wouldn't be disturbed.

Administering the drug was easy. A cup of coffee, a thank you for her help in one of the tests. Getting her on her own was another matter! But he had a semblance of an idea.

The Gene room! A sterile quarantine area off limits to only the most senior staff, himself and Professor Moore.

Not very romantic, with its tiled walls, its concrete floor and stainless steel work benches. And he didn't think the negative air pressure at a cool 41 Fahrenheit would help either. But with nothing but the automatic gene slices and electron microscope for company. It was private.

So if he chose a time when Moore was off....? He smiled to himself as the image of Sandra sprawled over a bench slipped into his mind. He could almost hear the cheeks of her bare bottom squeaking against the shiny surface as he drove into her, slow and languid. His hands buried in the soft yielding flesh of her tits. His fingers' twisting their little buds till she screamed out in ecstasy. Begging him to push harder, faster. "More! More! MORE!!!"

He took the tablets out and looked at them.

They looked little more than Aspirin. Six innocent white tablets, yet they held the secret of hot steamy sex! He lifted them to his lips and kissed them. Yes he would use them, and soon he would be kissing something immeasurably more tasty. Something warm and damp with exotic musk, secret lips that held the gateway to paradise.

Slip, slip, slickerty slip.

The following Wednesday Ethan rose early. He threw open the curtains to a bright sunny morning, and smiled. It was a good omen!

It was Moores day off and Ethan had decided that today was to be *thee* day!!

He took particular care with his shower that morning. Washing his small penis thoroughly just in case he got lucky, and the tablets were strong enough to get her to take him in her mouth!

He'd like that! God would he like that!! He stood under the warm spray smiling. His soapy hands idly sliding up and down his throbbing member.

Only they were Sandra's fingers sliding over his hard shaft now, not his own, Her long perfectly manicured fingers pulling the foreskin back from his swollen gland and soaping the tip with brilliant white suds against its deep purple flesh The image was so vivid he was tempted to rub harder to ease the throbbing need in his groin. But no, he couldn't risk it. If he satisfied the need now, only to find later when he had her before him, with those shapely white thighs spread wide, that he couldn't rise to the occasion....! He shuddered at the thought.

So reluctantly releasing his penis he quickly finished his shower dried and dusted him self down with talc, and then put on the brand new underwear he'd bought specially for the occasion.

A white vest tucked into Boxer shorts that had little red hearts all over them.

Putting on his best suit (double checking the zip for quick release action), he stepped into his extra high built up shoes and stood in front of the mirror. He was still little more than 5' 4" even though his shoes looked like they'd escaped from a sixties rock concert. He smoothed his wet hair down with his hand, flattening it in an Adolf Hitler style. Ethan leaned his head forward, turning it from side to side. He closed his lips, trying to hide the two protruding tombstones that followed the same slope as his Roman nose. It was no use! He still looked like a rat!!

With a defeated sigh, Ethans shoulders drooped in despair. He just hoped the tablets were strong! Very! VERY strong!!

At the door to his bedroom he turned and surveyed the room. It was frugally furnished with a single wardrobe and bedside cabinet both in mock teak. Heavy, dark brown curtains hung limply either side of a window whose only view was of a busy main road and Victorian terraces opposite. The cabinet stood next to a single bed with a plain brown duvet that matched the curtains thrown over it. On the cabinet stood a James Bond Alarm clock and a picture of his late parents. A big built woman with a large nose and buckteeth. Whilst his Father was almost handsome, only his build let him down. Thin and weedy like an anorexic jockey! Ethan sighed, if only he'd had his mothers build and his fathers looks, he wouldn't need such things as Spanish Fly to get a good looking woman. But no it was just his luck for the opposite to happen. Just like Jamie Lee Curtis, handsome father and beautiful mother, yet somehow ending up with the worst features of both. Not that he'd kick her out of bed of course! The image of her stripping of slowly in front of Arnold Swazanegger in 'True lies' filled his mind (he'd seen the film six times just for that one scene). She may have drawn the short straw with the face he thought, but the BODY!! Jesus! He'd crawl on his belly just to get the slightest whiff of her fanny. He mused briefly of slipping Jamie some Spanish Fly but quickly discarded it as a hopeless daydream.

His gaze roamed around the walls; there were no pictures in the room. The

only decoration, the spear he'd been forced to buy, hung over the brown draylon headboard . He hated the damn thing but..... What the hell! It cost too much to just throw it away!!

Cold and empty, it was a more than just a single person's room. It was a virgins room!!

All his life Ethan had lusted over beautiful women. Always looking, looking. Never managing to get any closer. One look at him and they would either turn up their nose's, or worse, sneer at him like he was insane. There were other women of course, perhaps not pretty women with perfect figures, who might have found him... acceptable? But Ethan was only interested in the unattainable beautiful ones. Ones that would never even give him the time of day. And so instead of dating lesser females, Ethan spent his time and his youth studying hard at university, before finally throwing himself into a career, in the hope of attaining fame, power and riches. Enough to attract the most desirable of women to him.

It hadn't worked!!

As brilliant as he was in his field, the 'Old Boy Network' conspired to keep him down, preferring the more charismatic people to lead their teams. Men who would make a good impression if it became necessary to talk to the media. Tall, strong, authoritative type men that inspired confidence in the general public on the more controversial experiments they were carrying out. Not weaselly little men that had them scurrying to their MPs to protest against everything damn thing they tried.

And so never getting his chance to work on the really big prestigious projects. Ethan had sunk into obscurity, never receiving the rewards or recognition he felt he deserved, or more importantly, the women!

He'd remained a virgin to everyone but his hand.

But today he thought with a grin. Today was the day! He looked again at the bed and wished he could get Sandra back here, so his bed could feel the weight of her. So her shape and smell would impinge themselves on his mattress, retaining it like a memory. But it was too difficult. Try as he might he couldn't think of any way that he could get her back here. So with one last look around the bedroom he shut the door walked through the equally sparse lounge and left.

Once outside in the hall, Ethan turned and locked the door to his apartment, hesitated for a second, then as a smile slowly spread across his face, whispered to himself, "Next time I do this I'll be a man!" He let out a deep-satisfied breath. "Finally!!"

Slipping the key into his pocket, Ethan in his eagerness to get to work as quickly as possible, ignored the elevator and skipped down the three flights of stairs with a grin on his face and a song in his heart.

"Finally!!"

Ethan checked his watch. She'd been working with him for over an hour now. Arranging different gene slices into the new matrix suggested by the computer programme. A tricky procedure at the best of times, but with Sandra sitting so close he could feel her body heat, and with the smell of her perfume filling his nostrils, he could barely concentrate on sitting on the stool let alone anything else.

They'd almost finished. Ethans heart was beating fast his hands almost visibly shaking. It was time!

He opened his mouth to speak and found he couldn't. His mouth seemed to have turned to a dust bowl, his tongue a hot dry stone in the desert. He rubbed his lips together to try and summon some spittle to free his tongue. It came slow and grudgingly. But what to say? He'd been over it a thousand times. Practising in front of the bathroom mirror, trying different expressions to make it look 'matter of factly' and innocent. But his mind had gone blank. And now she was getting up to go!

Think man! Think!! THINK!!!

She was looking at him, smiling "If you need me again, Dr. I'll be in Lab 2.C preparing clean slides for the next batch"

And now she's turning!

Say something! ANYTHING!! QUICK!!

She takes a step away. Two. Three!

For Gods sake say something!! NOW!!!!

"Miss Preston!"

There it was out! A weight seemed to lift with those two words and he could talk again.

Then Sandra turned and looked back at him with that perfect face and he felt all the weight return with crushing force.

I can't do this! I can't!!!

But amazingly he could. Somehow he suddenly found himself smiling at her and even more astoundingly heard a voice, his voice! A voice that seemed to come not from his mouth but from somewhere high above his head, offering to buy her a coffee.

"Only one from the drinks machine I'm afraid," he added with a sorrowful frown, "A small recompense for all your hard work."

If he was amazed, then Sandra was completely shell shocked! 'Roland Rat'

as he was referred to behind his back, renowned for keeping himself to himself, had actually offered to by her a drink. She didn't want to of course! The guy was a little pervert, either trying to look up her legs or down her blouse. Not openly like all the other men, that was fine that was natural. But 'Roland Rat' was sneaky. He sniffed around you with his beady eyes when he thought you weren't looking, in a way that seemed dirty and made you feel like scrubbing your skin till it bled.

However he was her immediate boss and could make or break her career if he wished. She sighed, she'd been dismayed when he'd asked her to assist him, and had tried to be as quick as possible in order to get away from his probing eyes. But now here he was asking her to socialise with him. If the other girls found out.... She'd never live it down.

She smiled weakly, "That's very kind of you, but I really have to get on with those slides!"

"Nonsense! We shan't need those slides till tomorrow. Plenty of time for that. Come, please sit down!" Now that he'd started he knew he couldn't let her go. Knowing instinctively that if he failed now, he would never be able to summon the courage to try again. "How do you take your coffee? Black or white?"

Sandra took a quick glance over her shoulder through the glass door to the next lab. There was no one about. If she was quick and drunk it quickly, perhaps no one else would have to know. She turned back to Ethan and sat down on the proffered stool, "Thank you, white with sugar."

"Good!" said Ethan, slapping his thighs as he stood up. "I'll just go and get them."

Sandra started to rise, "I'll fetch them. It's not your place to wait on me. I'm the assistant!"

Ethan put a restraining hand on her shoulder, his heart missing a beat at the softness of her skin, even through the Lab coat. "No, No. It's my treat I'll fetch them."

Sandra quickly sat back down eager to rid herself of his clammy hand that seemed to linger on her shoulder longer than necessary.

Ethan slipped his money into the machine and pressed the buttons to select Sandra's drink. The plastic cup dropped into the holder with a hollow 'thunk'. As he watched it filling up, Ethan slid his hand into his pocket and popped a tablet out of the pack. Taking the drink out of the dispenser he turned away and dropped the tablet into the coffee.

It sank like a stone!

SHIT!! He'd forgotten to crush the tablet first.

Ethan cursed himself for not remembering to crush the tablet into a fine powder before hand. He stared into the light brown liquid. His fingers burned with the heat but all he could think about was what Sandra would say when she found a half-dissolved tablet in the bottom of her cup. He'd just about decided to throw it away and abandon the attempt, when the tablet suddenly surfaced puffing out into a blister of foam.

With a sigh of relief Ethan took his Biro from his top pocket and stirred the coffee to disperse the bubbles. Putting it on top of the machine he selected a drink for himself, not really wanting one, but not wanting to arouse Sandra's suspicions either by making her drink alone.

He walked back smiling broadly with a drink in either hand. Only noticing, with a jolt of panic, as he was handing the spiked coffee to Sandra that it had white bits floating on the top.

Sandra peered at the coffee, frowned, and then glanced up at Ethan with a questioning look.

"Milk powder!" Ethan stammered hastily, "Mines just the same" he added, quickly taking a sip so she couldn't see into his cup. "Bloody machines! Ay!!?" he said smiling feebly.

Sandra peered once more into the cup then back at Ethan.

Ethans tried to keep his smile as natural as possible, but it felt stiff and false and the muscles in his cheeks seemed to quiver under the strain as he watched Sandra put the cup to her lips and take a small sip. She licked her lips tasting the liquid, the slight frown still playing across her brow.

Please be tasteless! Please. Please. PLEASE!!

Then to Ethans great relief, she raised her eyebrows, shrugged and began drinking.

YES!!!

She downed the cup in a couple of swallows, despite its obvious heat as if dying of thirst. Then she quickly stood up, thanked him for the coffee and started to march briskly away to the other Lab.

Ethan hadn't expected such a quick departure, he'd hoped to keep her in conversation till the tablet took effect. But now she was going! He had a sudden premonition of her succumbing to the drug in another department, and some other person reaping the benefits of his Spanish Fly.

He had to do something! He looked down at the tray of prepared slides on the bench, and with sudden resolve knocked them on the floor.

Sandra spun round at the loud crash behind her. 'Roland Rat' was kneeling on the floor busily picking up the contents of the tray amid a floor littered with broken slides. "I accidentally caught them with my sleeve when I stood

up". he said looking up at her with a pained expression on his face. "Do you think you could give me a hand? I'm afraid we will have to start all over again" he added with an apologetic smile.

With a deep sigh Sandra hesitated for a second, then forcing a smile said, "Of course professor" She knelt down and joined him in collecting the all the broken pieces.

Once all the debris had been collected and disposed of they once again began the arduous task of setting out a new batch of gene slices.

As they worked Ethan kept eyeing Sandra closely for the first signs of the drug taking effect. At first she appeared unaffected. Then slowly he began to notice subtle differences in her. Her breathing became shallow gasps that she seemed to be continually swallowing. A fine perspiration glistened on her forehead and her eyes seemed to become dull and unfocused.

She suddenly staggered to her feet a hand pressed to her forehead as she weaved from side to side.

Ethan jumped beside her, "Are you alright Miss Preston?"

"N-no I-I...Feel really strange...!"

This was it!

Ethan moved in quickly to put his arm around her waist and pull her to him. "It's alright Miss..Sandra, I'll look after you," he said, his eyes locked onto the heavy rise and fall of her tits. "You come with me. I'll take you somewhere quiet". His heart was beating madly and his whole body began to shiver in anticipation.

Finally!

He began to lead her away from the bench in the direction of the corridor leading to the Gene room.

They hadn't moved more than a few yards down the corridor, when Sandra suddenly stopped, turned to look at Ethan. "I- I'm sorry but I think I- I'm going to....." Her face suddenly turned a sickly yellowy green as she slapped a hand to her mouth and turned and bolted for the door marked 'Ladies'. Ethan chased after her a cold dread filling his stomach. "Sandra.. Wait!!"

Sandra burst through the Ladies room door on the run. Ethan stopped as the door swung shut behind her. He leaned his ear against the door and rapped on it's surface, "San.. Miss Preston are you alright? Miss Preston!?"

From inside the room came the sound of retching followed by splashing then more retching, a gut wrenching sound that turned Ethan stomach over. He sighed deeply his whole frame sagging as he rested his head against the door.

Failure!!

After several minutes the door opened and Sandra staggered out, a hankie pressed to her lips her hair hanging limply over jaded eyes.

"Are you alright Miss Preston?"

I- I don't know what came over me!" she said shaking her head, "I suddenly felt so terribly sick."

"Probably a bug you've picked up," he offered.

"Yes. Must be. Unless it was that coffee?" she said turning to look him in the eyes.

Ethan turned white, "N-No it couldn't have been that." he stammered, his white face quickly reddening up. "I mean it was only a coffee... Just a normal cup of coffee..." "His face felt like it was burning, she must notice it she must! He tried to turn his face away, " Besides" he added with sudden thought, "I had the same as you and I'm alright" he said turning back to smile to show how well he was feeling. "No it was almost certainly some virus you've picked up."

Sandra quickly stifled another retching attack in her hankie, and then when she'd got control again agreed, "Yes you're probably right."

"Yes of course I am!" he said with relief, "Now you get yourself off home and have a lie down and I'm sure come tomorrow you'll be feeling a new penny."

"Thank you. But the slides?" She said looking back towards the Lab.

"Don't you worry about those? I'll soon fix them back up. Now off with you, get yourself home."

"Thank you Professor you're very kind..... If you're sure you can manage? I would like to go home."

"Then it's settled. I'll see you in the morning if you're feeling better."

Sandra gave him a weak smile and gripping the hankie tighter to her mouth hurried away.

Ethan sagged on the spot. God that was close!

He took the tablets out of his pocket and looked at them. Aphrodisiacs! He might have known! It was the story of his life, one disappointment after another. Dejectedly he turned to the other door and made his way into the 'Gents'.

Ethan popped the tablets out of the blisters and dropped them one by one down the toilet pan. As each one puffed up into a ball of foam and dispersed in the water, he felt his dreams puffing up and dispersing with them. That's what really hurt. Not just the money thought that was considerable, or the humiliation of having to deal with the obnoxious Leroy and the black

woman. It was the realisation that all he'd hoped for over the last few weeks was not now ever going to happen. EVER!!

Dejectedly he flushed the toilet, and stood watching the gushing water wash away his dreams.

He washed his hands automatically at the wash basin, staring fixedly at his reflection in the mirror opposite. He seemed to have shrunk. His sagging shoulders matched his lips making a perfect curve. He felt like he'd never smile again, that the oppressive weight pulling on him would drag him into his shoes never to be seen again. As he stared at his own reflection he noticed behind him standing in the corner, Leroys mop and bucket.

Suddenly he wasn't down anymore, suddenly he was angry. A fiery heat burned inside him at the injustice of it. It was Leroys fault! He and that woman were probably in cahoots with each other to make a fool of him. Well he'd show them! No body messed with him!!

Ethan stormed out of the 'Gents' bent on confronting the black Janitor. He marched down the corridor, and there he was at the other end, talking to one of the female staff. A Black woman by the name of Janine or Germane or something like that, he wasn't really sure. He stopped. He hadn't realised just how big the black man was. The two of them were talking in whispers. Then Leroy lifted his wrist and showed her the watch he was wearing, an expensive one if her reaction was anything to go by. Probably cost about half what he'd given the woman shopkeeper. Then suddenly they saw him. Leroy flashed him a huge grin then bent and whispered something in his companion's ear. She immediately clamped a hand to her mouth and slipping Ethan a sidelong glance guffawed into her hand.

Ethan burned; they were talking about him he was sure. His little hands bunched into tight fists showing pure white knuckles as he ground his teeth together.

Leroy as if sensing Ethans anger, straightened up to his full six four, broadened his shoulders, and stared back with a small sneer on his lips that seemed to say 'Come on then sucker! Lets see's what you got'.

Ethan hovered for a moment, eyes locked with the giant. Then suddenly spun around a started back the way he'd come, trying to ignore the fresh laughter that echoed up behind him.

Once out of sight, Ethan slipped back into the 'Gents', strode purposefully over to the corner, then after knocking over Leroys mop and bucket, went back to work with a self satisfied smile on his face.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EXPERIMENT

Ethan sat slumped in his chair, his eyes watching but not taking in, the pictures that flitted across the T.V screen in the corner. His mind was full as always of Sandra Preston. It had been several weeks since the fiasco with the coffee. His initial fear of being found out and then the enormous relief of getting away with it, had long since passed. Now only the same deep longing to fuck her brains out remained.

A useless dream!

He sighed and reached for the remote control in the vain hope of finding some distraction among the other channels.

'click' Brookside! *Crap!!*

'click' The Cook Report! *Fat Get!!*

'click' Floyd on Africa! *You've got to be kidding!*

'click' Back to the nature programme he'd been half watching before. David Attenborough in the same white shirt and trousers he'd seemed to wear all over the world. He smiled to himself, a rare expression for him nowadays, as he imagined David Attenborough standing in front of his wardrobe clad only in vest and baggy boxer shorts, rubbing his hands in indecision as to what to wear today, from a wardrobe full of nothing but white shirts and trousers.

On the screen David's face beamed out with the same infuriating smug expression as he twittered on about the 'Trials of Life'.

Ethan was just about to reach for the red button and consign the 'know-it-all' to the diminishing dot in the screen, when a single phrase stopped him dead.

"The much small spider must use natures own aphrodisiac to help him overcome, and subsequently mate with, the much large and deadly Black Widow female spider....."

Aphrodisiac!!?

His finger slid from the off button to the volume control, and held it down till the black cursor was more than half way along the green band at the base of the screen.

David Attenborough's voice boomed across the room as Ethan edged forward on his seat. He watched in fascination as he was told how the male exuded a pheromone that seemingly hypnotised the female into acquiescence, allowing the tiny male to mate with her.

"However there is danger here" continued David, "The final consummation somehow breaks the trance like state that the female is held in. Now the male is not so much a mate as a potential meal. Only the very fast or the very lucky survive this brief but intense love making...."

As if to emphasis the point the screen suddenly erupted into frenzied movement, followed quickly by a shot of the female spider sat in the middle of a still bouncing web, with the male spider seized between her front legs.

Ethan cringed as the camera zoomed in for a close up as the larger spiders mandibles sheared through the thin neck of the male spider, decapitating him before thrusting the rest of his still wriggling body into its huge maw.

The next shot moved onto two Mayflies locked together in flight. Ethan muted the sound and settled back in his chair.

Pheromones. Nature's aphrodisiac! Of course! Why hadn't he thought of that himself? It was all down to a scent! A very particular scent, but a scent never the less.

If he could just develop the right kind of bodily scent... He could have any woman he wanted..... Sandra!!

The smile slipped from his face. There was only one problem, the human race had evolved to a stage where the production of pheromones was almost none existent. And even if he found away to create them, enhance them even! He still didn't think they could ever be strong enough to have the same kind of control he'd witnessed with the spiders.

He lent back in his chair and closed his eyes, his brilliant mind analysing the problem from every angle. When he ran out of sensible options, he turned to the bizarre!

All life forms on the earth, are basically the same, he mused. He remembered from his University days the professor of biology telling the class that all life shared 98% of the same D.N.A. It was only the last 2% that made the difference between the species. That we are in fact fifty times more alike with the flea that bites us, than we are different from it!

Therefore..... an aphrodisiac that works on a spider!... Might just be made to work on a human! Genes held the history of life's evolution from the primeval soup to the present day. If he could just find a way to establish the difference in that last 2% of DNA. And then if in some way he could access the dormant primeval genes that lay within that short strand. If he could do that AND! Make a corresponding alteration to the females... Sandra's primeval genes!

Then he could be in with a real chance of obtaining his dream!

But was it possible? He stood up and turning off the television proceeded to pace back and forth across the room. His mind racing! As he went over

and over the gene splicing techniques he'd developed over the years. Sometimes he would suddenly come to a stop as a particular problem vexed him and he would stand very still his eyes tight shut his breathing becoming shallow. As if his body was shutting down, allowing more energy to be diverted to his enormous intellect. Then with that problem solved he continued his pacing, mumbling to himself all the time, ideas far ahead of its time.

Yes Ethan Pickney was truly a brilliant man.

And totally insane!

His lust for the soft yielding flesh of his assistant had become obsessive beyond all reason. His entire being was concentrated on one thing, one single objective.

To fuck Sandra Preston!!

After two hours of pacing and muttering and pushing his formidable brain to the limit. He suddenly stopped, lifted his head and smiled.

He *KNEW*!!. It was possible!!

Over the next few months Ethan purchased large quantities of the male and female spider. Always at different shops so as not to arouse suspicion. He spent every spare hour he could in his lab on the project. When ever he could acquire the use of the Lab, every lunch time, every break, even working late into the night on some pretext or other, he would be there. He even built a solarium in his apartment for the spiders so as to study their behaviour and breed them to help with his heavy demand for spiders. All of which were doomed to go under the dissection knife for their precious genes.

After months of searching he'd achieved only very limited success. He'd managed to isolate the male spider's exact section of the D.N.A responsible for the production of the pheromone okay. But the female receptor gene was proving more elusive. He'd only managed to approximate the section of D.N.A responsible down to a short strand. And although short, invisible even, to all but the most powerful electron microscopes, the strand was far too long in genetic terms. The small strand contained millions of amino acid combinations, when he was only looking for a few dozen!

But by far his biggest disappointment was his failure to find corresponding sections of D.N.A in human genes. Evolution it seemed was greater than genetic memory after all, and had erased them from the human make up. Permanently!!

This had forced him into the only option left to him.

He somehow had to splice the precise piece of spider D.N.A responsible for the creation of the pheromone and the receptor, into the human geneo. Then attaching it to a fast replicating virus and injecting it directly into his

and Sandra's blood streams, where it would grow to such an extent that it would readily combine with their own D.N.A. And begin to production of large quantities of pheromone in him and receptor in her.

Ethan worked feverishly spurred on by the presence of Sandra's lithe young body. So close and yet so far!

On the six day of October at precisely 2.15, after weeks of testing the male section of spider DNA on rats, he injected himself with the pheromone serum.

The results were startling quick. Although he exuded no obvious odour, almost immediately people in the lab became skittish of him, shying away on a some basic instinctive level. And to his utter desolation it seemed to affect Sandra more than most, always edging away when they worked together. Even though he could see the confusion in her eyes at her own behaviour, still she continued to avoid close contact.

Spiders! However, where a different matter.

He was overrun with them! No matter where he went, his flat, his car, even in the controlled clean conditions of his lab. They seemed to emerge from the smallest nook and cranny to plague him, continually running over all parts of his body and in particular his crotch, infesting him with their presence.

'SLAP!'

Ethan nonchalantly brushed the squashed body of the spider off the back of his hand. After six weeks of constant infestation the removal of yet another spider went by barely noticeably.

He leaned back over the electron microscope and peered at the image before him.

He'd managed to pare down the female D.N.A strand further. It was down to only, *only!!*, a few hundred thousand amino acid bases now.

He sat up on his stool and sighed as he rubbed his podgy hand wearily over his face. At this rate it would be another five, maybe, six months before he isolated the exact piece he was looking for.

Six months!! An eternity! Still! He thought with a grin, she was worth it.

He was still sitting there grinning to himself, lost in his world of dreams when he suddenly became aware of someone standing slightly behind him. He spun round on his stool to face the interloper.

"Well what do you want!?" he growled.

Darryl Stopes recoiled slightly as Ethan spun to face him.

"I er... We were wondering... if you would like to.." the tall sandy haired man tentatively offered an open topped box towards him.

Ethan peered inside at the collection of notes and pound coins.

"Not another bloody collection!!?"

"Y-yes I'm afraid so.." Darryl said taking a half step back. He hated himself for doing that! After all he was a good fifteen years younger, a foot taller and twice as strong as he was, more as a brown belt going on black belt Karate enthusiast, infinitely more able. Yet here he was feeling intimidated by the smaller man. And even more perplexing, this feeling of fear had only developed recently. He like everyone else had always made Ethan the butt of his or her jokes. But now no one joked anymore around Ethan Pickney . There was something different about him nowadays, something..... Alien!!

The half step back was not lost on Ethan. He smiled smugly at the younger mans discomfort. It was worth a few spiders crawling over him, just to see these brash young bucks cower away from him.

Darryl took the smile as an invite to continue, and forcing himself to stand his ground pushed the box further forward.

"Everybody else has chipped in!" he said defensively.

"Well what is it for this time. Huh!? Birthday, anniversary, DEATH!!?" " He added hopefully.

"No no. It's a going away present!"

"Oh and who is it this time? Another one of those fly by night office clerks that come and go like a fart in a bucket!? Or perhaps one of the cleaning staff (Please let it be that black bastard Leroy!) Huh!?"

"No it's Sandra Preston!"

"WHAT!!!"

Ethan leapt from his stool, startling Darryl into another backward step.

"B-but she can't! I mean.. We are talking about the same Sandra Preston? My junior assistant?"

"Yes of course! That's why we thought you might like to contribute to the fund!"

Ethan could feel his whole life draining away. "But.. When? How? S-she never mentioned to me anything about leaving!"

"Perhaps she didn't like to. I mean going to one of our main competitors and all."

"Competitors?... Who!?"

"Apparently Gunther Pharmaceuticals made her an offer she couldn't refuse."

"Gunther Pharmaceuticals? But that's in....."

"Germany! Yes that's right. She flies out early Saturday morning. Lucky stiff! They've given her own flat and double, DOUBLE!! The salary she gets here."

All Ethan could do was stand and stare, his mouth open like a dead goldfish.

She was leaving!!

"So er.. if you would like to..er.." Darryl shook the box.

The clicking coins cut through the dazed fog that had filled his head. "What? Oh yes of course" he rummaged in his pocket and pulled out a handful of coins and dropped them into the box staring absently ahead, seeing nothing but the image of Sandra walking away from him. Forever!

"Hey! Thanks Mr Pickney." Beamed Darryl as he viewed the crumpled up ten pound note dropped in the box, his smile quickly turning to a puzzled frown at the assortment of coins that accompanied it!

Then with the promise of bringing a communal 'best wishes' card around for him to sign, ambled off, shaking his head as with one finger, he moved the coins about for a better look at what he'd been given. Even pennies! For Christ sake!!

Ethan slumped on his stool. He turned his head slowly to look at the work on his bench.

So near and yet so far.

Saturday! Three days to go! Could he finish it time? If he worked around the clock dispensed with some of the safety procedures and went all out for it? The answer was obvious.

No chance at all!

But there had to be! HAD TO!!

He spun around and increased the magnification on the electron microscope. The tiny pared down section of D.N.A filled the viewer.

It was in there somewhere! The little switch that would turn on the sexual receptor was in there. Perhaps as little as one tenth of one percent of what was left. A tiny amount! A needle in a haystack never the less!

Perhaps he was being too careful? After all he had no idea what the rest of the fragment did! It could be of no consequence! Some minor effect that could pass unnoticed?!

On the other hand.....?

He brushed the thought away. If he started now and worked all the hours he could. He might be able to attach the complete piece of the strand to the fast breeder virus by late Thursday. That would give him Thursday night and

most of Friday to test it on one of the white rats. If the rat survived with no complications. He could try it on Sandra before she left Friday night. How he'd get it into her blood stream, he could work out later. For now he needed to start work preparing the serum.

Brushing yet another spider from his arm he began the procedure.

Ethan worked feverishly. His recently acquired pheromone successfully kept people far enough away to allow him to abandon his proper work, and concentrate solely on his own project. Even so it was hard going. Tying such a large piece of D.N.A to the breeder virus was proving extremely difficult. Time and time again the virus rejected the implant, leaving Ethan more and more frustrated.

By Thursday morning he was very worried. By lunchtime he was frantic! It just wouldn't gel!! He glanced at the clock, 5-30, knocking off time!

Desperate for more time Ethan concealed himself in the toilets till everyone else had left. Then pulling the shades down to conceal the light resumed his experiments. He worked furiously through the night. Then at around 3 o'clocks in the morning, the virus finally accepted the modified D.N.A as its own.

He was ready!

Rushing down to the testing lab. He moved quickly to the batch of white rats allocated for research.

In the one cage, the rat with the same implant as himself ran about its cage. Its original small penis had grown, like his own, to more than double its normal size and was in a state of perpetual 'hard on'. Ethan smiled as he rubbed his own engorge penis, one of the benefits of the serum. But like him it was plagued with spiders. Small ones skittered over its back and nestled in its fur, whilst the larger ones ended up as a quick meal in its voracious jaws.

Ethan turned to another cage. This one occupied by an uninfected rat. A large white female rat that Ethan had Christened Sandra.

Ethan opened the top of the cage and reached in. The rat scampered to the corner of its cage and squeezed itself against the bars trying to avoid Ethans grasp. Taking it by the tail, Ethan lifted the squealing rat from the cage and placed it on the bench. Pinning it down with his other hand, he reached into his lab coat and withdrew a small syringe.

"Now! Now! Sandra. This wont hurt a bit" he grinned, imagining Sandra's fanny in his hand instead of the struggling rat.

Without loosing his grip, he expertly used thumb and forefinger to pinch the fur into a fold of flesh at the back of its head. The rat squealed loudly as the needle slid into its fur. And even louder still as he squeezed the liquid beneath the layer of skin.

Ethan sat hunched over the bench, chin resting on the back of his layered hands. As tired as he was, his attention remained steadfastly fixed on the cage before him. It had been over an hour now and still the rat showed no sign of anything untoward. Indeed it seemed quite frisky. Running about its cage, stopping every now and then to stretch up against the wire mesh, exposing its soft white belly as it sniffed the air.

Now was the crunch time! He knew he should put the two rats together; enough time had elapsed for the fast breeder virus to do its work. But he was afraid! If it didn't work....? What then? There was no time left to modify the process. Sandra was leaving tonight. It had taken longer than he'd expected. As it was there was only about six hour's left before her going away party at lunch time.

It was shit or bust time. And he knew it!!

With grave misgivings he dragged himself off the stool and across the room to the other cage.

The male rat, as if knowing what was to happen, dashed about its cage, squeaking excitedly. And almost leapt into Ethans trembling hand to be lifted out of the cage.

As Ethan approached the other cage, the female's friskiness ceased. It became more and more alarmed with each step. It crouched in its corner facing its adversary, hunched up protectively, its beady pink eyes locked on the approaching male.

Ethans spirits began to sink. It was not a good omen!

The male rat was going wild in Ethans hand. Its small hard penis digging into his palm as he struggled to hold on to it.

Ethan stood before the females cage reluctant to have his worse fears confirmed. It was a failure!

With sudden conviction and with his heart hammering in his chest. He opened the top of the cage and dropped the eager rat inside.

The deed now done, he was desperate to see the results.

Crouching down he peered through the wire mesh. And his whole world seemed to drop like a giant icicle, to the base of his stomach, threatening to piece his bowels and spew his most treasured hopes and dreams all over the lab floor.

The Sandra rat was running away from its intended mate, in an obvious state of panic!

It had all been for nothing! All the risk, all the months of hard work. Wasted!!

Ethan on the brink of tears bit into his knuckle for distraction in an effort

to hold them at bay. Only to see small money spider crawled out from between the fingers of his clenched hand, and skit down over his arm.

Ethan broke down completely.

Resting his head on the bench he wept bitterly, banging his clenched fist again and again against the wooden top.

It was over!

Ethan was distantly aware of the squeaking noises coming from the cage but ignored them in his absolute desolation.

So lost was he in his own self pity that it was some time before it registered that something different had happened.

The rats had suddenly gone very quiet!?

He looked up through bleary eyes to see the two rats facing each other. He lifted his glasses and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand, before replacing them and leaning forward for a closer look.

The Sandra rat was motionless, almost statue like. Whilst the male rat sniffed at her nose and mouth as if tasting her. Suddenly the male rat moved to her rear, and after a few exploratory sniffs under her tail, mounted her and began thrusting into her like he only had two seconds to live. And all the time the Sandra rat stayed absolutely still, not resisting, not helping, true! But never the less not objecting either.

So still was she that for a horrible moment Ethan thought that she was dead. That somehow the unrefined piece of D.N.A had caused changes that were incompatible with her make up, creating flaws that had killed her. But on closer scrutiny he could see her sides moving in and out as she drew air into her tiny lungs. So not dead but what? There was something odd about her, something he couldn't just put his finger on... And then he had it. Her eyes! Although her body remained still and acquiescence. Her eyes were feverish, darting back and forth in the same alarmed fashion they had when he'd first brought the rat over. It looked terrified, but more than that it looked helplessly confused. As if it didn't know why the hell it was doing what it was doing!

It could mean only one thing....

Eureka!! He'd found it! Eureka!! The ultimate aphrodisiac!

Spanish Fly!! The best damn Fanny burner in the world!

He threw his head back and laughed aloud. It was so damn fitting! The old nursery rhyme jingled into his mind and he began to sing his own corrupt version of it.

"He swallowed a spider to catch Spanish fly.

*I know why he wanted the fly.
He wanted the fly to open her twat,
Well fancy that! He wanted her twat
He wanted his cock just like the spider,
To wriggle and wiggle and wriggle inside her."*

Ethan hugged himself, giggling hysterically at his own cleverness.

Everything was OK It was going to work after all!

Ethan came back into the animal testing lab after a short nap in his car and freshening up in the 'Gents' and made a beeline for the rats' cage. Struggling out of his white coat he tossed it carelessly over a stool, and peered inside the cage. They were still at it! After four hours the rats were still locked in the act of copulation. The smaller male rats' hind quarters still thrusting back and forth at the same frantic rate. Whilst the larger female still with the same horrified expression in its eyes, allowed the rat unresisting access. Ethan shook his head in wonder. Four hours!!

Just then the male rat suddenly stiffened, his thrusting became spasmodic, then finally stopped. It lay on the females back panting.

"Well about time too" chuckled Ethan. Then to his absolute amazement. The rat started again, without ever withdrawing, it restarted its urgent thrusting.

Ethans look of amazement slowly turned to a leering smile. "I hope I'm as lucky" he muttered to himself, stroking the bulge in his trousers as the image of an unresisting Sandra on all fours sprang into his mind.

Sandra!?

He turned to look at the clock on the lab wall. 12-45.

His smile withering to a worried frown, Ethan looked closer at the female rat. It looked alright!? He looked again at the clock as if expecting to say something different than it did three seconds ago.

12-45! 15 minuets left!

With sudden resolve he lifted the top off the cage and with some difficulty managed to separate the two rats.

Taking the female over to his workbench. He sat and held the rat under the light from his desktop lamp. Just as in the cage the rat lay unresisting in his hand. Its beady eyes now firmly locked onto his.

Ethan took a large magnifying glass from his draw and began examining the rat in detail.

He'd hoped to have more time to evaluate the effects of the serum, at least till knocking off time tonight. But events had out flanked him. Sandra had told him, grudgingly it had seemed, that she was finishing at lunchtime, so as to enjoy a going away party at the local pub with her colleagues. And even more grudgingly, had asked him if he wanted to come.

Of course he'd seen in her eyes and manner that she was only asking out of politeness. That in fact he was the last person she wanted to go. But he'd pretended not to notice her reluctance and had insisted, much to her dismay, that he wouldn't miss it for the world!

But now as he sat examining the rat, he had serious misgivings. Six hours was not nearly enough time to be sure if it was safe.

Still the rat seemed fine. Apart from the lethargy and some hair loss it seemed quite healthy in fact. The lethargy was a worry though! What if it was brain damaged? What if he'd taken, as evidence of the aphrodisiac working was really no more than a damaged brain?

As the unresponsive rat lay in the palm of his hand, Ethan put down the magnifying glass and drummed his fingers on the bench, deep in thought. Across the room he could see other rats in their cages milling about in the loose straw.

"I wonder..."

He jumped up from his seat and strode purposefully across the room to one of the uninfected rat cages. The rat inside backed away as he opened the top a placed the female rat inside.

Nothing happened! The rat just lay there.

"Damn!! He let out an exasperated snort and stared at the motionless rat. It was brain damaged after all!

As he stood looking in, he noticed the healthy rat cowering in the corner. "I suppose you don't like my presence either do yo....!" Something clicked n his mind.

"My presence! Of course if the healthy rat is behaving like that because I'M here then..."?

He took two steps back.

The female rat moved. Not much! But it moved!

Ethan walked back another six steps, and to his delight the female rat stood up and began pacing the cage. Its former sole occupant also came out of its corner. Ethan moved all the way back to his desk, barely daring to breath.

Both rats returned to behaving normally almost instantly.

Smiling Ethan strode back up to the cage, causing the one rat to return to its corner, whilst the female returned to her former lethargy.

It did work!! The rat was responding to the pheromone that he and the male rat now shared.

He lifted the motionless rat out of the cage and holding it close to his face, smirked as he said. "So there's nothing wrong with you after all" He threw back his head and laughed.

He dropped the rat back in with the treated male rat, which immediately mounted it and resumed its copulation.

Ethan gave the rat a mock salute and said, grinning ear to ear. "Enjoy, my soul mate, I've my own fish to fry now". He slipped the small vial of serum into his briefcase and left the room locking it securely behind him. Then practically flying down the stairs he ran out to the car park and jumped behind the wheel of his car. As the engine started so the radio blared out the latest pop song. Normally Ethan would quickly have turned it off or found another channel more suited to his tastes, but today he was in much too much of a hurry to waste time playing with the radio. The car took off with a screech of tyres and a plume of blue smoke, the loud music fading as he sped away.

A pity really!

Had he not have been in such a hurry and turned the radio off, he may just have heard the high pitch squealing that came from the laboratory window.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINALLY...!

Ethan sat in the pub car park checking the contents of his briefcase for the fifth time in as many minutes. He ran his finger slowly and carefully down the outside edge of the briefcase, stopping with a start when he reached the small shard of glass protruding from the bottom corner. All set!

He checked the clock on the dashboard. 1-24. He was late!
But he wasn't worried. It was a party after all. And he was sure it would last longer than 24 minuets!

A sudden thought struck him. What if they've told him the wrong pub?! He knew he wasn't well liked. Perhaps they'd deliberately misled him, so they wouldn't have to suffer his unwelcome company!?

The more he thought about it, the more certain he was that they had. That even now they were probable all having a good laugh at the thought of him stranded and alone in some strange pub. Fool! He should have followed them! Made sure they couldn't leave him out. But he'd had to prepare, and there just wasn't enough time!

Grabbing his briefcase he got out of the car and hurried towards the entrance of the 'The Milkmaids Pale' Praying they would be in there.

Ethan pushed open the heavy wooden door and was immediately assailed by the overpowering smell of spilt ale and cigarette smoke. Ethan hated pubs. A place for lesser mortals!

He stood in the doorway and scanned the sea of faces. Somewhere in the crowded room a jukebox vied for attention amid the noisy chatter and clinking of glasses.

Seeing no-one familiar he began pushing his way through the crowd, a task much easier now with his new ability's, as people seemed only too eager to move out of his way. Ethan smiled.

Lesser mortals!!

They weren't there! With a grim expression Ethan turned and made his way back to the entrance, cursing beneath his breath. He was just about to leave when the sound of laughter filtered through a door opposite. Ethan read the sign on the door 'Lounge' then quickly back to the door he'd just left 'Bar'. Ethan smiled, of course they wouldn't use the bar if it was a party. With a resurgence of hope he pushed the door open and peered into the room. There they were! All sat in a half circle laughing and joking with Sandra seated in the middle. With great relief Ethan pushed the door open fully, and then marched up to the congregation. As he approached so the smiles and laughter died. He could see Sandra's face drop as she saw him, could see the others turning in the chairs away from him. He didn't care! He was used to it. Story of his life!

Fuck em!

Pretending not to notice the chilly reception Ethan smiled at Sandra. "Hello Sandra. Sorry I'm late. Can I get you a drink?"

Sandra not wishing to encourage him , or perhaps because she remembered the last time He'd bought her a drink quickly refused. "No, no I'm fine I still have one at the moment" Then as if to illustrate the point picked up her glass and took the smallest of sips from the nearly empty glass. The emptiness of the glass wasn't lost on Ethan, but choosing to ignore it, just smiled and added "Perhaps later then" with that looked around for

somewhere to sit. Everybody seemed to be making themselves as wide as possible to avoid the chance of being sat next to. He didn't mind, in fact he was grateful. It allowed him to get a spare chair and place it where he wanted it. Not next to Sandra as she was surrounded by her colleagues. But in the way of the only rout to the bar or toilets. If Sandra needed to go she would have to pass right by him.

Perfect!

He sat down on the fringe of the group and placed his briefcase next to him in the gangway. And waited.

Ethans presence hung over the group like a black cloud. The conversation had become stilted all the previous jollity now gone. Several people had already drifted away on some pretext or another and those that were left where obviously keen to follow them. The party dwindled till only a few close friends and Ethan remained. It was clear they wanted him to leave by the way they continued to talk as if he wasn't there, deliberately leaving him out of the conversation.

But Ethan just sat there with a fixed humourless smile on his face and waited.

After half an hour Ethan was getting anxious. It was getting late and Sandra still hadn't moved.

She must have a bladder like an elephant!

Several of the men had left to use the loo, stepping over his briefcase rather than asking him to move it, but Sandra? Nothing!

Just as he was beginning to lose hope, Sandra suddenly stood up announced that she was just going to powder her nose and made her way through the chairs past Ethan. Just as she was about to step over the briefcase, Ethan snatched it up saying "Here let me move that" As he did so he brushed the edge of the case with the protruding glass against her leg. "OW!!" Sandra screamed as the glass cut a one-inch gash in her leg. "Oh I'm so sorry. Did I catch your leg with my case?" said Ethan with a concerned frown.

"Yes you did!" She answered staring at him accusingly "What have you got in there?"

"N..Nothing." he stammered "it's probably a bit of grit it's picked up when I've put it on the ground." He made a big show of examining the case. "Are here it is. Just like I thought, it's a bit of grit trapped in the lining. Ethan using the sleeve of his coat for protection quickly brushed off the small shard of glass before anyone could see it or the small traces of glue he'd used to stick it on with.

"I'm most dreadfully sorry. Look at your poor leg! It's bleeding quite badly!" he said resting the case on his lap.

Sandra sighed "It's OK. I've got some plasters in my handbag. It'll be fine" *Shit! She's got her own plasters!*

"No...No you can't put a plaster on it" he said almost panicky. Her eyes narrowed as she looked up at him. "I mean you can't put a plaster

on till you've cleaned the wound" he added hastily. The suspicious look disappeared as she continued her search for the plasters somewhere in the bottom of her bag "No it'll be alright. They're medicated." She said as she began taking stuff out of her bag.

"B..But that won't be enough" Ethan spluttered "I mean that grit came off the street. Who knows what it's been exposed to?"

Sandra had found a plaster and began pulling off its protective covers. "It's only a bit of dirt. Not exactly going to kill me is it? She lent down taking the plaster to the wound.

NO.NO.No!!

"DOGS" He shouted.

Sandra flinched, the plaster hovering over the wound.

"Dogs!" he continued "You know what dogs like for fouling the pavement, There could have been some of that on it,"

Sandra hesitated, a slight grimace creased her face at the idea. The plaster hovered an inch from the cut.

Ethan watched as Sandra hesitated, convinced that she would dismiss the idea and cover the wound with the plaster, spoiling his plans at the outset.

Then Rob Allen, another lab assistant unwittingly came to his assistance.

"He's right Sandy. You don't know what kind of crap there may be on it!" Sandra looked at her friend and sighed "Yeah I suppose so. But I've got no choice. I mean what can I clean it with?"

Rob rose out of his chair "I'll see if they've got anything behind the bar"

"There's no need. I've got some antiseptic in my case." Ethan quickly intervened, stopping Rob in his tracks. "I always keep some there for emergency's" he added in response to Rob's quizzical look. There was a brief silence as Ethan expecting some argument, turned to scan the faces around the table. When none came and Rob with a shrug of his shoulders sat down again, Ethan releasing his pent-up breath smiled and began fiddling with the combination lock on the case. He was that desperate to get into the case before anyone changed his or her mind, that for a few seconds he couldn't remember the combination,

Come on, COME ON!!

His birthday that was it !

What was his birthday again?

COME ONnnnn!!

And then he had it. Ethan quickly turned the tumblers to 145. With a satisfying 'clunk' the catches flew open

"I think I've got some cotton wool in here as well." Ethan muttered as he delved into the case. In the bottom he found the carefully placed piece of cotton wool and the vial of serum, keeping his shaking hands deep inside the case so no one would see, he unscrewed the cap and poured the contents onto the cotton wool.

"Here we are" he said, brandishing the doctored wool. Then putting the

case on the floor dropped to his knees and reached for Sandra's leg.

"I'll do it!" she said jerking her leg away.

"Nonsense! I won't hear of it! This is entirely my fault. The least I can do is clean it for you. Besides I'm here now."

Again he reached for her injured leg. Unable to move her leg any further back because of the chair. Sandra grimaced as Ethans cold clammy hand gripped her calf.

Ethans heart leapt at the feel of her soft warm flesh in his hand.

Oh dear God this is going to be sooooo good.

He gave two little dabs with the wool before quickly pressing it into the wound and squeezing the serum into her blood stream.

"OW!! That hurt" Sandra screeched as she slid her chair backwards pulling her leg from Ethan's grip.

"I'm sorry! But its antiseptic it's meant to sting a bit" he said giving her a weak smile. "Er... You can put the plaster on now."

But Sandra just continued to stare at him accusingly.

"If you don't put it on quickly the dirt might get in (or the serum leak out)" he urged.

Sandra hesitated a moment more as if knowing something was wrong. Then with a little shake of the head bent to fix the plaster, stopping only to rip a larger hole in her damaged tights for the plaster to fit in.

Safely fixed, Sandra stood up and resumed her trip to the 'Ladies'. For the first time since arriving Ethan relaxed as he watched Sandra half limp away. He lent back in his chair and smiled to himself.

Gotcha!

All he had to do now was wait.

Sandra returned from the toilet stopping only to deposit her ruined tights in the litter bin. "Well" she said, returning to the table "I guess I'll call it a day. Thank you all for coming and the lovely card and pressie" She lent forward to pick up the large card which sat in the middle of the table next to a brightly wrapped gift box.

Ethan jumped to his feet "But you can't go yet. It's to soon... I mean I haven't bought you a drink yet!"

"That's alright Mr pickney .I've had more than enough all ready."

"No. No I insist! You can't leave with out me thanking you for all your hard work over the years. Come on just one?"

"Wellll... I don..."

"And your friends" he continued quickly "I haven't bought them a round either. I'm sure they'd like another. Rob, you'd like another wouldn't you?"

Rob lifted his glass and looked at the last few mouthfuls in the bottom, then up at Sandra. He gave a little shrug of the shoulders and said, "It's up to you kiddo. What do you want to do?"

Sandra looked around all the expectant faces, then with a weary sigh sat down. "Okay! But just the one then!"

Ethan made a note of what every one wanted then slowly made his way to the bar. As he waited at the bar he assessed how long it would be before the serum took effect. He knew from his trials it would start very quickly, maybe 20 or 30 minuets. He had to keep her here as long as possible. If she left before it took effect....

Ethan deliberately deferred to other customers, who had come to the bar after him, to stretch it out. When he could avoid ordering any longer, he deliberately waited till the barman had served a drink and asked for payment before asking for the next. Then refusing the proffered drinks tray slowly carried each drink back to the table one at a time.

Ethan checked his watch; he'd managed to waste 12 minutes fetching the drink. If he could just make them hang on for another 15 or 20 minutes... He looked around the table; half the glasses were still three parts full. He was glad now he'd bought everyone a pint, even though some had only asked for a half. It was clear; some were really struggling to get it down.

He checked the time again. He was getting worried. 45 minuets and still no reaction. He was thinking hard trying to find another delaying tactic when... Sandra lurch a little forward and putting her hand to her forehead began massaging the skin there.

"What's up Sandie?" Rob said putting his arm around her "You feeling alright?"

"No. I feel sort of... Strange!" She replied groggily.

"Here" Rob said lifting her to her feet "I'll take you home"

Ethan recognised the symptoms immediately; she was exhibiting the same glazed expression he'd seen with the rats. Now was the time, he had to act quickly

"No that's alright Mr Allen. I'll see Sandra gets home alright" Ethan said rising to his feet.

"You!!!" Rob snorted "What Makes you think Sandra would want you to take her home?"

"I'm sure Miss Preston would prefer me to take her that's all"

Rob shook his head with a sneer "I don't think so" he began steering her around the table.

"Why don't we ask her what she'd prefer?" Ethan said moving to intercept.

Rob hesitated. Looking from Ethan to Sandra, asked "You don't want him to take you home do you?"

"I... I don't kno.."

Ethan stepped close and leaned in to Sandra. "You do, don't you?"

As Sandra drew in a deep breath the glazed look in her yes deepened

"Yes.. Yes I'll go with you"

"WHAT!!" Rob tried to turn Sandra to face him but she twisted her head so as not to break contact with Ethan's gaze. "Sandra you can't mean you actually want to go with this little creep'. You know what he's like! He's

always perving after you.”

“You heard what she said. She want’s to go with me” Ethan insisted, and then taking her hand in his he began leading her away.

Rob grabbed her arm. “Sandie. Think about it?”

“Mr Allen!! Miss Preston has made herself perfectly clear. She want’s to go with me!” Ethan stepped towards him and was pleased to see Rob flinch back at his approach.

Good old spidey smell

“Now if you would be good enough to release her arm, Miss Preston and I will be on our way.”

Rob looked into Ethans eyes and was dismayed to find himself letting go of his friends arm and stepping away. It was silly really, he was a good 10 inches taller and much better built than his opponent. Yet something.. Some sixth sense seemed to be screaming at him to let it go. He hesitated a moment longer then with a huffy shrug of the shoulders and “Please yourself” turned and resumed his seat.

Ethan lead Sandra across the car park and over to his car. He sat her in the front passenger seat, walked around the car and slid behind the steering wheel. He looked at Sandra who sat motionless with her hands lying demurely in her lap, staring straight ahead. “Put your seat belt on Sandra.”

Immediately without a change of expression, she reached up, took the belt and plugged it into the clasp, before replacing her hands backing her lap and continued to stare, unseeing, straight ahead.

Ethan drove out of the pub car park and turned towards the laboratory. He began to imagine all the things he could do to her when they got to the gene room.

The Gene room! Did he really need that now?

Ethan swallowed nervously “Miss Pres.. Sandra would you like to come back to my place?”

With out shifting her gaze Sandra responded in a flat monotone voice. “What ever you say”.

“Good. Good, well that’s that settled” Ethan smiled tapping the steering wheel with pleasure. “My place it is!” and with that turned the car towards his apartment and his date with destiny.

CHAPTER SIX

Pleasure and....

Ethan opened the door to his apartment. “In you go my dear” he said ushering Sandra into the room. Once inside he turned and resting his back against the locked door. exhaled deeply. She was here!

Now it starts!

He led her into his bedroom and stood her in the middle of the room.

“Why don’t you make yourself more comfortable? Take off your coat.”

Without hesitation Sandra slipped her coat from her shoulders letting it fall to the floor uncaring. She stood motionless where Ethan had put her like a mannequin in a shop window.

Ethan walked slowly around her, eyeing her voluptuous figure. God she was beautiful. “Sandra, do you mind being here?”

“What ever you want” she replied in that same monotonous drone.

“What I want Sandra is for you to...” Ethan swallowed hard this was it, the moment of truth!

“I want you to... To, take all your clothes off!”

There was a momentary flicker in her eyes. The hypnotic daze cleared for just a second. The horror filling her face and was quickly followed by a look of disbelief as she saw her own hands, rise and begin to unbutton her blouse. He could see her eyes dart from side to side in fear, her hands hesitating on the second button.

He stepped closer “You heard what I said.... I said strip!”

Again the deep intake of breath, her eyes fluttered shut for a moment and when they reopened the glazed expression was back. The moment of defiance beaten as her hands resumed the unbuttoning of her blouse.

The dark blue blouse slipped from her milky white shoulders, exposing the black lace bra beneath. The blouse discarded her hands disappeared behind her back as she reached to unhook it.

She’s doing it! Dear God she’s actually DOING IT!!!

He couldn’t believe it. It was actually working!

She’d almost undone the bra when Ethan suddenly stopped her. “Wait! Let’s do this properly” He took her by the hand and led her to the bed. Standing her just in front of the bed Ethan made his way around the front and sat eagerly on the edge of the mattress facing Sandra. He sat with his hands in his lap just as she’d done in the car, staring up at her, mouth open, hardly daring to breathe. “Continue” he said with a slight nod of the head.

Again Sandra reached behind her and undid the hooks on the bra. Then taking the shoulder straps pulled the bra away. Ethan gave a little whine as her ample breasts tumbled into view. The skin was the colour of whipped cream, beneath the surface light blue veins showed lightly. Her nipples had a rose petal hue and were as big as the tip of his little finger. She moved to undo the belt of her skirt.

“Wait! Not so quick! I want to have a good look.”

Sandra released the belt and stood erect, hands at her sides, looking down at the man before her. Her eyes gave nothing away but Ethan could hear the difference in her breathing, it was becoming heavier more feral. He could sense the sexual tension rising. He smiled; the Spanish fly was getting stronger, arousing her own sexual desires. Soon she’d be insatiable not just obedient but demanding.

He sat turning his head this way and that surveying the wondrous flesh

before him

“Turn around” he said making a little circle motion with his finger. Sandra duly complied turning full circle.

“Now jiggle them a bit.” He said shaking his own shoulders in demonstration.

Again Sandra did as she was bid. Her heavy breasts bobbed first up and down, then from side to side in response to Ethan’s continued direction. Ethan leaned forward and marvelled at the almost fluid like elasticity of them. He imagined how their softness would feel against the skin of his hands, and wondered how the ripe nipples would taste in his mouth.

But first things first! He sat back on the mattress “Carry on,” he said gesticulating with his hand.

Sandra undid the belt, unfastened the top button and slid the zip all the way down. Kicking off her shoes she pushed the waist of the skirt over her hips with a little wriggle, stepped out of the skirt and tossed it to one side. Her panties matched her bra, black lace. It wasn’t a thong nor a ‘Bridget Jones’ passion killer, but he sort where the leg bottoms where level with the crotch, making them look like a band of lace circling her bottom. Ethan like that! *Real sexy!*

Sandra put her thumbs in the waist band and began pushing them down.

“Slowly!” Ethan ordered hastily. “Nice and slow.”

Sandra hesitated, then began slowly to inch her panties down. Again Ethan leaned forward, his face a few scant inches from that which he desired most in the whole world. He could make out the crease of her vagina through the panties and a few errant pubic hairs protruding from the sides.

It was amazing how low the panties could go before they showed any thing. And then her pubic hair appeared over the rim of the panties. Ethan leaned even closer. Finally the panties dropped to the floor.

Ethan stared; he couldn’t see anything except a thick tuft of dark hair where he knew her fanny must be. He frowned it was hard to get excited over a patch of hair, especially when it was a different colour to what he was expecting, her being a blonde and all.

He looked up at her “Show me!” he said.

Nothing!

“I said open your legs!”

The resistance returned as her eyes cleared briefly, she bit down on her lip trying to will her legs together. All to no avail. As if they had a life of their own, her knees slowly parted.

There!!

As her legs parted so the edges of two pink lips peeked out from the forest of hair.

“Wider!!” he commanded

Sandra her moment of resistance gone, duly squatted with her knees as far apart as possible. The lips of her vagina parted to expose two inner lips.

Ethan breathed in the heady aroma and marvelled at the glistening almost raw flesh that up till then he'd only ever seen in photos or pornographic videos.

Gingerly he reach out a hand, lifting the middle finger slightly he slid it into her warm silky crease. It was moist and slippery. The inner lips seemed to wrap around his finger as he pressed it harder into the folds of her sex . Finally after rubbing it up and down a few times, he slid the finger into the salivating hole that coated his finger with its warm pungent secretions. It was unbelievably soft in there, past the restraining muscles at the entrance, the walls of her uterus offered no resistance to the probing finger. He added a second finger and pressed them further into her body. The walls of her uterus felt like they were made of sponge, incredibly fragile. So fragile he felt they would tear under his persistent probing.

He withdrew the fingers and putting them to his nose breathed in the aroma deposited on them. He was surprised to find that they smelt slightly of fish. The scientist in him reasoned that it was a vestige of out time in the sea in our long distant past. Whilst the man in him didn't give a flying fuck why it smelt like that, all he cared about was thrusting his cock in there as soon as possible.

His already erect penis was throbbing painfully against the confines of his trousers. He shifted his position and pushed it to one side giving it a bit more room.

He really wanted to do it now, but he remembered how the rats had behaved, how once they'd started they had been able to keep it up none stop for hours. And he didn't know what would happen when the intercourse finished. The spell, like with the spider, may be broken and Sandra may come to her senses.

He didn't know what the consequences would be, maybe he'd go to prison, or maybe she'd say nothing and just run off. But one thing was for certain he would never have this chance again and there were so many other things he wanted to try first.

"Okay Sandra, I want you to knell down before me."

She went down on her knees before him. Her eyes locked on his as she waited for the next command.

"Now I want you to undress me."

Sandra leant forward and began unbuttoning his shirt. Ethan wasn't pleased, something was wrong. He wanted it to be erotic and arousing but it all seemed so cold and mechanical. He wanted to tell her to do it better but couldn't, his own inexperience robbed him of the words he needed. And then he had it, in one clear moment of inspiration, he knew what to say.

"Sandra wait"

Immediately she stopped and leaned back into the same staring position.

Ethan took a second to formulate his words, and then said "Sandra I want you to imagine that I'm the most handsome, sexist man you ever met, and

more than anything else in the world you want to please me.”

He watched as Sandra’s expression changed, her pupils dilated, a half smile played around the corners of her mouth as the tip of her tongue slid lasciviously across her top lip. Her breathing became even deeper, faster, causing her breast to heave up and down. Her nipples became hard and erect; goose pimples erupted around the areola, and she began rubbing her thighs together slowly, rhythmically.

Slip, slip slippity slip..

Ethan smiled “Continue”

Again Sandra leaned forward and reached for his shirt, only this time no mechanical unbuttoning. Now she gripped the shirt with two hands and tore it apart giving out a little growl as she did. She pulled his neck onto her mouth and began running her tongue up to his ear where she took his earlobe between her teeth and nipped it playfully.

Ethan drew in a deep breath in shock.

Oh this is better... This is sooo much better.

Ethan allowed him self to be pushed back on the bed. He lay there half on and half off the bed, with Sandra leaning over him. She slid her tongue down to his nipple and gently tickled it with her tongue as she gently twisted the other nipple between two fingers. Ethan was amazed, he knew from books that a woman’s nipples were sensitive but had never dreamed that his own could also be so pleasurable. He lay there with his eyes closed savouring the delicious moment when suddenly she stopped. He opened his eyes and saw her between his legs tugging at the belt of his trousers. She continued to smile at him, never once taking her eyes away from his, whilst at the same time removing the belt and unzipping his fly.

He looked down along his body as she pulled his trousers and under pants down together in one quick movement. He saw his engorged penis, freed from its confinement jut into the air. From his position on the bed it looked enormous. It must have been a good ten inches long (Good old spidey power) and at least two inches in diameter. The purple knob on the end pulsed with the beat of his heart.

Sandra removed his shoes and socks along with the trousers and again loomed in between his legs. For the first time she moved her gaze from his face and surveyed his crotch. Her eyebrows raised in appreciation of what she saw there, the smile on her face becoming even wider.

She reached out a hand and gently slid her fingers down his shaft. They were cool and soft and Ethan thought he’d died and gone to heaven.

Her gaze returned to his, an eye brow rose this time in question.

Ethan swallowed hard “Yes... Yes do it “

Sandra looked down at his member then back to his face but did nothing. “Do it!... Put it in your mouth...Do it !! DO IT!!!”

Sandra again looked down at his penis, hesitated for a couple of seconds, and then lowered he head to his shaft. At the last second she parted her lips

and took the tip of his knob in her mouth. Ethan threw his head back and groaned aloud as he felt her tongue circle its very tip. Small circles to start with but getting bigger and bigger as it travelled down his swollen gland. He felt the flesh on his cock being drawn up as she began to suck.

Oh God Please don't let it stop ...Please..

He looked up with a start as her teeth brushed painfully against his skin. He panicked at the thought that she wasn't really under his control at all and that she meant to bite of his cock in retribution. But she opened her mouth wider and the offending teeth no long grazed him.

She had the first two inches of his penis in her mouth and was sucking gently, when she suddenly took a deep breath and slid her mouth all the way down to the base of his shaft. Ethan blinked in disbelief.

Jesus!.. It must be three parts down her throat!

Unable to get the fingers of one hand around his shaft, she used two hands to circle the base of his cock and brought them up and down in time with her mouth. The combined wanking action of her hands and the warm soft sucking of her mouth were more than Ethan could stand. He could feel the ecstasy building to a crescendo.

"No...No . Not yet! I haven't fucked you yet!" he cried out.

But Sandra only sucked harder, her hands moving faster, faster.

"No...Nooooo ...Ah...Ahhhhhh Yesssss!"

Like a fire hose he emptied himself into her mouth. He could see her swallowing hard trying to keep up with the sheer volume he was spurting into her.

After the initial euphoria had passed off, Ethan felt cheated. He'd been made to shoot his load before he could screw her. Now as he looked down at his flaccid prick, lying spent against his body. He doubted he'd ever get it up again! She'd beaten him. At the last moment she'd managed to stop hi.... ..It moved! His penis rolled around till it was inline with his body and then wonders upon wonders it lifted off his stomach and resumed it's fully erect status. Ethan laughed, he should have known. The rats in his laboratory had been the same, recovering in seconds from that would normally take hours. Even after all that ejaculation. He'd won after all.

He sat up and looked at Sandra who had a hand to her mouth and was swallowing quickly trying to keep everything down.

Ethan sneered "Serves you right. You fucking bitch!"

Suddenly Sandra lost the battle and turning to the side managed to crawl a few feet before spewing the contents of her stomach all over the floor. Ethan grimaced at the mess on the carpet. A few part digested crisps floated on top of a shimmering puddle of yellowy white spunk.

Jesus! Did that all come from me?

He was amazed! He'd read somewhere that scientists reckon an average man only ejects a tea spoonful of semen during ejaculation.

But then he wasn't an ordinary man was he! Hee hee hee!

He wondered pound for pound just how much a spider ejaculated during its mating. He suspected it was probably on a par.

He considered making her clean it up, but not wanting to waste the time, chose to ignore it for the time being

“Sandra, come back here.”

Sandra spat something of the end of her tongue then wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, turned and shuffled on her knees back to the bed.

As she knelt before him, Ethan looked into her face. Even with the sickly pallor of her skin and the haunted lacklustre eyes. She was still beautiful. Her hair hung down over one side of her face making her look rakishly sexy. He leant forward and pushed it back behind her ear with his hand. The smudged lipstick couldn't hide the full splendour of her lips, a full cupid's bow on the top and a plump bottom lip that seemed to offer so much promise.

He wanted to kiss her, feel the soft skin pressed against his. He'd always imagined that they would taste of strawberries, but a quick glance back at the mess on the floor and he quickly regretted not kissing her earlier. There was no way he was doing it now, not now he'd seen what had just passed over them. But still all was not lost, there was still her nipples, he was sure they would taste of strawberries also.

Ethan dropped his gaze to her breasts and was alarmed to find some of the vomit had splashed on to the left side. A slimy trail led down to a small globule of semen perched on the rise of her breast.

Oh no! You're not spoiling it for me!

He grabbed his torn shirt from the floor and began wiping it off.

His breathe caught in his throat at the feel of her breast. Even through the fabric of his shirt the flesh seem almost impossibly soft. Ethan threw the dirtied shirt to one side and placed his hands an inch above the waiting breasts. He licked his bottom lip in anticipation, then flexing his fingers, placed his hands on her tits as if he was about to play the piano.

A shuddering breath slipped from his open mouth as he gently squeezed the spongy globes. They felt like nothing he'd ever experienced before, soft and yielding to the touch. It inflamed him; his ministrations became harder, more urgent. Sandra bit her lip as the squeezing became painfully rough. He took her nipples between his fingers and rolled the buds between the pads of his finger tips, squeezing and twisting harder and harder. Only stopping with a smile of satisfaction when biting her lip against the pain she gave out a little yelp.

Ethan put his nose between her tits and pressed the two mounds to his cheeks. He rolled his face from side to side relishing the feel of them against his skin. He lifted his head to find a nipple, red and angry from his abuse, tantalizingly close to his mouth. He extended his tongue and licked its tip as she had done to him. Finally with eyes closed and with utmost reverence, placed his lips over the erect nipple.

He sucked the nipple into his mouth, teasing it with his teeth before taking in

the areola as well. He sucked long and hard. Sucking...sucking... suc..

Ethan released the nipple, leant back a little and frowned as he looked at the wet pink stub before him.

It didn't taste of strawberries! In fact it didn't taste of anything. It was a bit like sucking your thumb.

He tried the other nipple. No! Still tasted like a finger!

Shit! He was disappointed! A little fantasy blow to pieces.

He began massaging her breasts again and was surprised how quickly he became bored with it. There was only so much you could do to them and after ten minutes he'd exhausted all of them several times over.

He sat back. What to do now? The night was still young, much too soon to start fucking. There had to be something else to do with her!

He thought back over all the porn movies he'd watched in the past for inspiration.

Anal sex!!

That wasn't real sex was it? He could try that. Not all the way of course. Just a couple of strokes to see what it felt like. Yes that was it! Anal sex!!

He jumped to his feet rubbing his hands in glee. Now what did he need...? Lubrication!

He remembered Marlon Brando in 'Last tango in Paris' and headed for the fridge.

Ethan almost ran back from the fridge, butter in hand. "Sandra. Lean over the bed and spread your legs."

Sandra did as she was told as Ethan knelt between her legs "Wider" he commanded as he opened the butter and took a two finger scoop out of the foil wrapper.

He parted the cheeks of her bum with one hand and was just about to smear the butter into her rectum, when he spotted a small brown smear close to the hole. Ethan jump back in revulsion.

Dirty cow!!

or a second he considered using his shirt again to wipe it off. But the brown stain only served to remind him of what was inside.

There's no way I'm putting my cock in that!!

Ethan hurled the butter away in frustration.

Another disappointment!

At this rate it wouldn't be worth going to prison for.

Wiping his fingers on the torn shirt, Ethan again tried to think of some other way he could use her. He drummed his fingers on his knee as he tried to recall scenes from the movies. There was only one thing he could think of. It wasn't much but at least it was something!

"O.K. I want you to turn over and sit on the edge of the bed."

Sandra did as she was told and spread her legs again as ordered.

"Now I want you to play with yourself" he said. "You know! Masturbate!"

Sandra's hand moved slowly down her stomach, over her Pubis Mons and

into the bush of pubic hair. There, one finger slid into the crack of her sex and began to rub.

“Wider! Let me see what your doing!”

Having opened her legs even wider and pulling her labia to one side to effect a better view. Ethan could make out Sandra’s forefinger making little circular motions around the small nub of her clitoris.

Ethan began to smile; he felt he was privy to something very secret. Something so private and personal as to be forbidden fruit.

“Tits! Don’t forget your tits” he urged.

In response Sandra’s other hand cupped a breast and began slowly kneading the soft flesh, her finger and thumb gently tweaking the nipple. Ethan giggled. He felt like a school boy peering through the window of the girls shower room.

Sandra’s breath became deeper. Soft grunts slipped from her lips as she rolled her head from side to side. The squeezing of her breast became harder, more urgent. The rubbing of her clitoris became faster...Faster. Her mouth opened and let out a long pent up breath as her tongue flicked across her top lip. She drew her knees up as her rubbing became more frantic the groans getting louder and more frequent.

Ethan was grinning wildly now. He was really enjoying this. His grin suddenly faltered as he realised she! Was enjoying it more than him!

“STOP!!” he shouted.

Sandra pulled her knees right up and groaned in frustration as her ministrations slowed.

“Stop! I said.” Ethan almost screamed “Stop right now!!!”

Reluctantly Sandra obeyed and lay back on the bed panting for breath.

“I’m damned if I’ll let you get more out of this than me!” he said petulantly.

But what to do? He had been enjoying it! There had to be some way.....

An evil sneer creased his face as an idea sprang into his mind.

“Wait there” he commanded as he turned and ran into the kitchen.

Sandra lay back against the bed eyes closed and waited. When she opened her eyes she saw Ethan standing before her with an empty wine bottle in his hand.

“Here” he said thrusting the bottle towards her. “Use this!”

A look of puzzlement followed almost instantly by a look of alarm, as realisation crossed her face.

“Come on!” he said, wagging the bottle in front of her. “Let’s see you masturbate with this!”

Sandra reluctantly took the bottle, turned it and placed the narrow neck into her vagina, Her face screwed up in concentration as she desperately tried to stop her own hands as they slowly began pushing it in and out.

“Come on you can shove it up father than that!”

Sandra’s defiance suddenly collapsed and she did as she was told, wincing as

the wider part of the bottle forced the lips of her vulva painfully apart.

Ethan laughed aloud "Not enjoying it now are you? Bitch!" Sandra continued to abuse herself with the bottle. Whilst Ethan looked on giggling insanely to himself.

Ethan suddenly stopped her. "Wait a minute I've got a better idea." Again he trotted off leaving Sandra with the bottle still inserted in her vagina. He came back with one hand hidden behind his back.

"Put the bottle down" he commanded. Then when she'd complied and with an evil glint in his eye said "I think pussy must be very hungry by now. Why don't we feed it aBanana!" with that he whipped his hand from behind his back and brandished a large semi ripe banana before her.

Dutifully she took the fruit and was about to insert it when...

"Peel it first! Pussy can't eat the skin. It might make her bad"

Ethan howled with laughter as Sandra slid the peeled fruit into herself.

"Here Pussy, Pussy. Din-dins!" he screeched in amusement.

Oh he was enjoying this. Forget sex for the moment. This was fun!

His pleasure was short lived however when the soft fruit broke, leaving half of it inserted in her fanny.

He quickly looked around for something else to use and fastened on the toy spear above his bed. Fetching it down he handed the blunt end to his captive. "Here you are, dig it out with this"

Ethan laughed hysterically as the little feather on the top of the spear flapped from side to side as Sandra attempted to insert it past the lodged banana.

Ethan was giggling fit to bust, when his laughter suddenly caught in his throat as a single tear rolled down Sandra's cheek.

In that instant he knew. He may have control of her body and even her mind, but deep down Sandra, the real Sandra was still there and was fully aware. And she was crying!

Somehow during the evening he'd lost track of the fact that this wasn't an animal or some plastic dummy. This was a human being.

Suddenly it wasn't funny anymore. He snatched the spear from her grip and rested it against the head board. "Alright that's enough"

He was tempted to let her go, but he'd come too far. And if he must go to prison as he most surely would. Then he was going to have what he set out for in the beginning. Namely; to fuck Sandra Preston.

Leaning down he put his fingers into her genitals and withdrew the broken end of the banana, and hurled it out of sight across the room so as not to be reminded of his own depravity.

He picked up his discarded shirt and gently, almost apologetically, wiped her genitals clean with out once daring to look her in the eye.

"O.K" he said standing erect. "Let's get on with it!"

He still wanted to experiment with different positions, and decided before they used the bed he'd try screwing her standing against the wall.

He instructed her to get off the bed and stand against the wall with her legs open. When she was ready, he positioned himself in front of her.

At last!

He put his hands on her hips and tried to enter her.

Too short!

“Crouch down a bit.”

Sandra spread her knees and crouched lower.

Still to short!

“FURTHER!!”

It was no good even with his enhanced penis; his legs were to damn short! She was almost in a full squatting position, but still he could only just get the tip of his knob in the folds of her labia. He would have to jump up and down to make it work!

He looked over at his briefcase lying on the floor where he'd dropped it and considered using it to stand on. But the ignominy of having to stand on a box to fuck her was just too humiliating for words.

Another disappointment!

With a deep sigh of acceptance Ethan ordered her onto the bed.

He knelt on the bed between her open legs, took his penis in his hand and prepared to enter her. He closed his eyes briefly and offered up a silent pray.

Please let this be worth it!

He opened his eyes and put the tip of his knob into the welcoming hole, then with a deep sigh pushed it all the way in.

And his prayers were answered!

Ethan had never experienced anything like it! The softness was beyond his wildest expectation. As he began to move back and forth the warm clinging flesh seemed to suck on his cock.

Oh yes this is what it's all about! This exceeded his best expectations. His thrusts became harder, deeper. His eyes closed in ecstasy as he rocked to and fro.

Oh Lord if your going to take me, take me now!

Reaching down he grabbed the cheeks of her backside and pulled her on to his shaft even harder.

Sandra threw her head back and moaned as his engorged penis literally pressed against the top of her womb. Ethan took long slow strokes, relishing the feel of her cunt against the skin of his prick.

Remembering what he'd seen in the videos, Ethan lifted her one leg and rested it on his shoulder half turning her in the process. Now he could see what he was doing. He watched in fascination as his cock pulled the small lips of her labia in and out. He could see the sheen of her lubrication glistening on the surface of his member. The smell was much stronger now, more intoxicating. He breathed it in deeply and drove into her willing flesh even harder.

Without withdrawing he took her leg off his shoulder, passed it over his

head and onto the bed leaving her in the ‘Doggie’ position. Gripping her hips he pulled her on to himself faster and harder. The room resounded with the sound of flesh on flesh slapping wetly.

He suddenly became aware of Sandra’s movements. She was pushing back against him with the same rhythm.

Slap...SLAP...SLAP!!

He could hear her start to moan with pleasure. But now he wanted her to like it. He wanted to hear her squeal with pleasure, pleasure that he! He was providing.

He reached underneath with both hands and cupping her breast began rubbing the delicious flesh whilst tweaking her nipples between his fingers and thumbs.

The response was immediate. Her soft moans became louder as she thrust back on to him even harder

Ethan smiled, good, but not good enough. Releasing one of her tits he reached down between her legs and began rubbing her clit.

“Yesssss!!!” she screamed, her voice was deep and gravely, almost a growl.

Ethan smiling leant forward and whispered in her ear. “Not yet baby” and with that, hooked her leg and flipped her all the way over back on her back, again without finding the need to withdraw. He laughed at the frustration on her face, but his laughter was short lived as with a scream of rage she grabbed his hips and lifted him bodily of her leaving just the tip of his penis inside her. Sandra began pumping him up and down as if he were no more than a toy, thrusting him in deep. In, out, in, out.

Ethan was stunned by her almost inhuman strength. Up, down, up, down without seemingly any effort.

Ethan could feel his orgasm rising, closer, closer! Closer!!... “Aghhhhhh” He felt his seed shoot deep inside her in a moment of pure ecstasy. And still Sandra continued. Harder and harder she thrust him on to her sex. The moment of ecstasy now prolonged past the point of pleasure and into the realms of pain Ethan called out to her.

“Sandra stop!

But Sandra didn’t stop, if anything her thrusting became even more energetic.

Ethan looked down into her eyes. Gone was the passive blank stare, now her eyes burned with a fierce hunger that sent a shiver down his back.

“Sandra I order you to STOP!!”

Flesh on flesh. *Slap.slap.slap.*

“Stop! Stop!! Stopppppppp...!!

Now she had control and he was the plaything. Nothing more than a piece of meat to satisfy her lust. It was no good; the serum had developed even further. Not only had it given her the spiders mating urge but also its strength and stamina.

His mind flit back to all the extra DNA he been forced to leave in the serum and wondered, as it continued to rush around her blood stream, what else it would alter.

His necked ached from the continual bobbing up and down as she used him. A quick glance at the clock told him she'd been at it for more than forty minutes and her pace hadn't slackened for a moment. He remembered with a sinking heart how long the rats in the laboratory had managed to go for. He'd already climaxed at least five times already, his penis only going semi-soft for a few seconds before getting hard and erect again. He'd tried stopping her by squeezing and twisting her breast painfully, but it only served to excite her and increasing her pace even more.

Ethan seemed to drift into a haze, as the rhythmic pumping seemed to hypnotise him into a state of stupor. He shook his head to clear it and glance once more at the clock on the bedside table. TWO HOURS!! He couldn't believe it. It had been a whole two hours since the last time he'd looked. He looked down at Sandra, her face was bright red with perspiration running off her brow and down her cheeks in little rivulets. Her breath was coming in short gasps in time with her thrusting.

She was tiring he was sure. He could feel the tremor in her arms as they struggled with their burden.

She must stop soon. Surely to God she has to stop. Please! The once deliciously soft interior of her uterus now felt rough and abrasive against his extremely sore and tender penis. Each stroke brought another level of pain.

It was strange he'd spent the last two and a half years wanting nothing more in life than to fuck Sandra Preston. Now as he she pummelled him into to her, he wanted nothing more than for it to stop.

Suddenly Sandra rolled him over and sat astride him. Pinning his shoulders down on the bed she began thrusting even harder, faster, faster!

She reminded Ethan of the rats in the laboratory, their hindquarters moving like a machine gun

Rat-a-tat tat. Rat -a-tat tat.

Ethan didn't think he could give any more. He was exhausted! His balls ached, his penis a white-hot blade buried in his crotch. He'd lost count of the amount of times he'd shot his load, but surely there couldn't be any more!

Sandra was frantic now, thrashing back and forth. Small gasps of breath slowly turned to little whines that grew in pitch and volume.

At last she was coming, Ethan was sure. At last the agony was about to end. Amazingly he felt his own climax coming again, only this time it seemed bigger. His balls seemed to draw them selves up into his body ready to give one last almighty spurt. His penis seemed on the point of exploding.

He had to release. HAD TO!! He grabbed Sandra's hips and with the last remains of his strength, thrust deep inside her.

Sandra threw back her head in a silent scream as Ethan ejaculated inside

her. To Ethan it seemed like his entire insides were pouring through his penis. He could feel the surplus spunk exuding from around the base of his shaft leaving a deep empty feeling in his very bowels.

He looked up at Sandra as she towered above him. She looked like some exotic statue, not moving, not breathing!. Her arms raised in the air as if in supplication with a frozen agonising scream etched across her face.

And as silent as the grave!

After nearly fifteen seconds of not moving Ethan began to fear that she was dead, that the shock or serum had been too much for her. That some kind of rigor mortis had set in trapping him beneath her corpse till they were found.

Then slowly like someone thawing out from being frozen solid, she began to soften. Her arms drooped to her sides. The twisted mouth returning to the soft Cupid's bow he'd not so long ago wanted to kiss. With great relief he heard her draw in a long deep breath, before collapsing on top of him.

She lay across his body pinning him to the bed. Her heavy breathing blew down his neck as he tried to lift her off. It was no good! He was exhausted. After a few failed attempts to lift her, Ethan decided to wait till his strength returned. So turning his cheek to the pillow he closed his eyes and slept.

CHAPTER SEVEN

.....Consequences

HOT!!

Ethan woke up and was immediately aware of the oppressive heat in the room. For a second he thought the room might be on fire, but a quick glance at the ceiling above put that fear to rest. No smoke!

He looked down his nose at the mop of blond hair that nestled under his chin. Sandra was still lying on him as she had when he'd fallen asleep. No wonder he was hot, what with Sandra lying on top of him like she was.

He breathed in the smell of her hair and smiled as he remembered the previous night's escapade. That had been sooo.. Good. Not at the end of

course, when she'd taken control, but before when he was in command.

In his mind's eye he could see her again naked, crawling across the floor to suck his cock. His smile broadened as he felt the first stirrings in his groin. His smile changed to one of astonishment when he realised that he was still inside her!

I've been in there all night!!

He recalled how soft and wet it had been in there and wondered if when he withdrew his penis if it would be shrivelled and wrinkled like when he'd stayed in the bath too long.

No not with good old spidey strength

He could feel his penis fully erect inside her. Maybe he'd have time to fuck her again before she woke and screamed for the police. He would have been tempted to try if not for the ever-present heat. He blew a droplet of perspiration off the end of his nose and shook his head to dispel the pools of sweat that nestled in the corner of his eyes making them sting with their salty liquid.

God!! He was hot!!

He thought that maybe if he could slide out from beneath without waking her, he could probably make a run of it. Of course it would mean giving up his job and all he owned, but at least he'd be free. He could try up north or maybe if he was lucky and she stayed asleep long enough, he might make it to the airport and catch a last minute flight to anywhere away from here. They would probably catch up with him eventually, but it could take years! And in the mean time he'd be free to try again. Free to perfect his serum and get rid of the extra DNA he'd had to use this time.

Then he would have complete control. Any woman he wanted, there for the taking.

Jamie Lee Curtis here I come! Hee hee, hee.

Ethan tried to slide out then realised his erect penis buried deep inside her made it impossible. It was as good as been nailed to her!

He tried to think of some other way to escape quietly, but it was hard to concentrate whilst he was so hot. It was no good he'd have to risk pushing off to the side as gentle as he could.

He put his hands on her shoulders, and then with a yelp of shock, withdrew them. The room wasn't on fire. She was!!

He reached out again gingerly with one hand and touched her left shoulder. It was only slightly warm. He tentatively tried her right shoulder and snatched it back quickly as it touched her flesh. It was red hot! Ethan couldn't believe flesh could be that hot, it was like putting his fingers into boiling water.

Scientific curiosity got the better of him and again he placed a hand just above the skin of her shoulder. After a few seconds of letting his hand get accustomed to the radiating heat, he lowered it till it was almost touching

The skin had changed colour like a huge bruise, to a deep purple, in

place's it was almost black. And covering the skin was thin stubble of black hair that felt coarse and sharp beneath his fingertips.

He placed his hand onto her upper arm and sucked in a deep breath as the temperature took his breath away.

Christ! Her metabolism must be running haywire!!

As he held her arm he felt the inside move as if the skin was filled with a thick sludge that squished beneath his grasp.

He quickly released it as if he'd accidentally picked up a piece of dog shit. A grimace furrowed his face as he hastily rubbed his palm on the bed sheets.

What the Hell is going on!?

Apprehension shivered up his spine as he recalled the surplus DNA circulating around her body.

Something's wrong! Something very, very wrong!

He had to get out. He had to get out NOW!

Ignoring the heat he grasped both of her shoulders and was just about to push when, a spider crawled over the ridge of her shoulder and down across the back of his hand, followed by another and another. Spiders where covering both hands now, more and more!

Ethan lifted his head to see where they were coming from. He looked over Sandra's shoulder and was alarmed to see the whole of her back and rump covered in spiders. Hundreds of them! Maybe thousands!

Little money spiders, large boiler spiders, even garden spiders with the white crucifix on their backs, swarmed over her. They moved in a seething mass, climbing over each other to try and find an exposed piece of flesh.

Ethan had long since lost his fear of spiders, but the sight of so many sent a shiver up his spine.

Feeling slightly scared now, he put his head back on the pillow and closing his eye pushed with all his might. It was like lifting a dead weight! Sandra half rolled to the side before crashing back down on top of him.

Ethan's heart was really racing now as panic started to build inside him.

"Get off meeeeeeeee!" he shrieked as he again tried to move her. This time he saw her face! And screamed" A sharp piecing scream that reverberated around the room.

The hair on her right side had come away leaving it stuck to his chest, and in its place was the same darkened wrinkled skin and black stubble he'd seen on her arm. The effected skin continued down her face, across one eye and over to the other side, completely covering the bottom half of her face. Only one patch of pink skin remained a small patch of cheek and forehead which surrounded her left eye. An eye that was staring down at him in abject terror.

Her mouth had all but sealed up with just half a top lip left, lying on the gnarled flesh like an albino slug. A deep rasping noise emanated from what was left of her nose as she struggled to breathe. Her right eye was gone! Sunk into a hollow of blackened flesh. Across her forehead large angry blisters as big as ten pence pieces had formed. But worst of all was the shape

of her head. The top half had normal proportions, but the bottom half had swelled out dramatically. Her bottom jaw had expanded leaving a deep cleft in her chin. It looked like someone had stuffed a king-sized hot dog into her mouth sideways on.

It came to him in a flash what was going on. The replicating virus he'd used to carry the spider DNA had accelerated her metabolism hyper fast, and was busily replacing some of her DNA with the extra DNA he 'd left in the serum.

This was bad! This was VERY bad! He had to get away quickly whilst she was still part human. If she developed the spiders instinct as well.....

"Get off me! GET OFF ME!!" he screamed, pushing as hard as he could.

When that failed he started punching her bloated face to make her give ground. One of his wayward blows splattered wetly as it made contact with a blister on her head.

He turned his head away from the hot stick goo that sprayed over him. As he turned back to look at his adversary he grimaced in horror as he saw a part formed eye emerge from the split blister and slide down the side of her head like a string of snot.

The Sandra creature reared back on her haunches in pain, sending showers of spiders off on to the bed. For the first time Ethan could see what the virus had done to her body.

One full breast, bobbed into view perfect except for one small black patch of skin. Next to it all that was left of the other breast was two-inch circle of pink flesh topped with a rosy nipple. The rest of the breast and torso had shrivelled and darkened like the colour of her face.

Her right arm hung limply at her side. Ethan noticed that it had almost doubled in length and seemed to flop about as if devoid of bone. It swung to and fro like a dead octopus's arm with every movement of her body. He could hear part evolved fragile bones snapping inside as it whipped about.

Beneath the arm were two large swellings as big as footballs sticking out from her side. Inside the translucence skin of one of the lumps he could just make out what looked like a coiled arm that every now and then flexed inside its water blister.

In contrast her left side seemed normal, virtually unmarked, save for small patches of blackened skin.

The Sandra thing lifted its good hand and wiping the eye off its face turned its hand to see what it was. A high shrill sound emanated from what was left of its mouth as it looked down at the remains of the alien eye with a mixture of horror and disgust. It threw it to one side and wiped its hand clean on the bedclothes. Slowly it turned its head to its attacker. Ethan looked into its eye and saw that the look of horror had past and was replaced with one of burning revenge!

Ethan tried desperately to wriggle free, but was quickly pinned to the bed as the creature's good hand shot out and leaned on his chest. Even in this

half-changed state she was still incredibly strong, pushing him hard into the mattress.

“LET me GO! Let me go, you fucking thing. Let ME GO!!!”

He pummelled her arm with his fists to all to no avail.

Slowly the Sandra/spider thing moved its head towards his. The bloated face hovered just inches above his.

Give us a kiss.

The sound of its breathing filled his ears, the putrid smell of the puss still running from the damaged eye, turned his stomach over and made him gag. It seemed to be taking pleasure from his discomfort. Turning its head to the side it began rubbing the ruined side of its face against his cheek. The coarse stubble scratched painfully against his skin. It was playing with him he knew. He had to do something now! Before its game became more deadly.

He reached out with his right arm towards the bedside table, frantically searching for some kind of weapon he could use. A clock, a pen, anything! His scrambling fingers suddenly closed around something thin and stick like.

‘Yo-er gen-uine African spear.’

With a sudden surge of hope, he slid his hand up towards the point, took a firm grip and swung it round in a tight arc, burying it into the creature’s side.

The half woman half spider creature reared backward dislodging the spear from its side, and threw back its head with an ear piecing whistling sound that jarred the very teeth in his head.

Ethan lay there terrified as the creature writhed above him, throwing its head from side to side. There was an audible ‘Craaack’ and the creature strained its face to the ceiling.

Ethans terror intensified as he saw the two sides of its bottom jaw start to move apart. The skin covering the cleft in her chin began to stretch, wider and wider. The skin was almost transparent now. The skin along the jaw line, white with the pressure.

Suddenly with a wet ripping sound the two halves of its jaw flew apart spraying bits of wet skin in all directions.

Beneath them the tongue flopped out. It was black and split down the centre, the two halves wiggled independently like inquisitive fingers.

The jaw pieces rotated slightly before slashing back across each other like a pair of scissors.

It looked down at Ethan, and then slowly opening its jaws again, started back down.

“NOOoooooooo!!!” Ethan screamed, and began stabbing it again and again with the little tin spear. Finally he hit his mark. The spear cut through the side of its neck sending a spray of blood across the room. Purple blood!

Spider blood!

He pulled it out and tried again. This time he hit a bone and the thin metal tip of the spear bent over and rendered it useless

Still it came! Ethan abandoning the spear put both hands against its chest

to try and hold it back. But as badly injured as it was it continued down relentlessly.

Ethans hands were slick with the creatures blood and one hand kept slipping off the one soft natural breast of the beast. A breast that for so long he'd lusted after, he now cursed as it conspired to prevent him from holding the creature back.

As it got closer he could see the white bone of the jaws still filled with human teeth, some with fillings, opening wider and wider.

Soon its nose was resting on his. Its fetid breath blowing across his cheeks. Its one good eye was level with his now. An eye that no longer belonged to the Sandra he knew. There was no wisdom or thought behind it now, only a primeval desire to kill. As he watched, the pupil began to slide up into its socket

It's dying!! If I can just hang on a little lon.....

Ethan sucked in a quick intake of breath as he felt the creature's jaws clamp around his neck. He yelled in agony as the things top teeth pressed painfully into his top lip. Ethan felt its split tongue enter his mouth and slide over his tongue trying to force its way down his throat. He bit down hard on it and felt the slimy interloper quickly withdraw, leaving a piece of its severed tongue in the bottom of his mouth, were it wriggled like a worm before it was washed down his throat with a mouthful of blood.

Instantly in response the jaws grip got tighter and tighter, gold stars played before his eyes, until he thought his head would explode.

The creature gave a quick shake of the head and he was free!

He rolled off the bed and onto the floor rolling over and over. He came to a stop facing the bed. The creature had collapsed and was deep into its death throes.

Beneath it something lay twitching, spraying bright red blood over the headboard.

Realisation dawned on Ethan in horror as the last few drops of blood drained from his brain through the severed end of his neck.

As the world started to disappear around the edges, the room becoming a smaller and smaller dot, one last memory triggered in his mind.

He'd read that some people took themselves almost to the point of death during sex, because they believed it heightened the orgasmic experience, and that death it self would be an orgasm to transcend all others

Ethan didn't think so....

Another disappointment

THE END.

Epilogue

Well I hope you enjoyed my small collection tales from the darkness and were not *too* offended!

But finally, here's my last words of advice.

Always remember, be careful what you wish for and avoid sweet old ladies that invite you in for tea.

Nor be tempted by those big flashy cars that wait by the road side.

And when you visit art galleries spare a thought for those statues that stare seemingly blindly ahead, and give them a little rub and a few kind words, for you never know.....

..... But run for your life if approached by a beautiful dark woman that seems to have something stuck in her throat.

And when some small insignificant insect happens to cross your path, be sure to look over your shoulder before you step on it! There may be something bigger waiting to tread on you!

Also if....Hang on a moment? No it's OK! For a moment there I thought I heard something ticking!? Oh well to continue. If you're approached by a short rat like person offering to buy you a drink! Run and hide in the loo as quickly as you can until he's gone

And as for the multitude of patterns that surround us, there's no need to worry dear reader, you're perfectly safe.....

.....As long as you don't believe!

Night-night. Don't let the bed bugs bite.....

Michael Job

